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THE GOESSLINGS



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THE POETICAL WORKS

OF

WILLIAM B. YEATS

VOLUME II — DRAMATICAL POEMS



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OF

WILLIAM B. YEATS

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOLUME II

DRAMATICAL POEMS

New York

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PREFACE

THE first two plays in this book were written before I had any adequate knowledge of the stage, but all were written to be played. I have always looked upon the play written to be read only as an imperfect form, even for the reader who would find it the more exciting for the vigorous structure, the working to a climax, that had made it hold some fitting audience.

A writer of drama must observe the form as carefully as if it were a sonnet, but he must always deny that there is any subject-matter which is in itself dramatic — any especial round of emotion fitted to the stage, or that a play has no need to await its audience or to create the interest it lives by. Dramatic art is a method of expression, and neither an hair-breadth escape nor a love

affair more befits it than the passionate exposition of the most delicate and strange intuitions; and the dramatist is as free as the painter of good pictures and the writer of good books. All art is passionate, but a flame is not the less flame because we change the candle for a lamp or the lamp for a fire; and all flame is beautiful.

A lover is subtle about his mistress's eyebrow, and I have found in Dublin a small audience so much interested in Ireland that they have not complained too loudly that my fellow-dramatists at the Abbey Theatre or I myself write of difficult and unfamiliar things. I have chosen all of my themes from Irish legend or Irish history, and my friends have made joyous, extravagant, and, as I am certain, distinguished comedy out of the common life of the villages, or out of a phantasy trained by the contemplation of that life and of the tales told by its firesides. This theatre cannot but be the more interesting to people of other races because it is

Irish and, therefore, to some extent, stirred by emotions and thoughts not hitherto expressed in dramatic form, for the arts have always gained by their limitations, and I look forward to a day when a company will carry its plays into other lands,—above all, where there are Irish people,—and when I close my eyes I can see all clearly. It will play principally comedy, for the day of tragedy will return slowly, but of an extravagant, abounding kind that is half poetry; the inspiration of a muse that, although she is a little drunken, her lips still wet from the overflowing cup of life, is ready, as in old days, to abate her voice when her sister has carried a taper among the tombs that she may tell strange stories of the deaths of kings. Above all, for one imagines as one pleases when the eyes are closed, it will be a theatre of speech; the speech of the country-side, the eloquence of poets, of rhythm, of style, of proud, living, unwasted words, and among

its players there may be some who can sing like a poet of Languedoc stories and songs where the music shall be as simple as in a sailor's chanty, for I would restore the whole ancient art of passionate speech, and would no more let a singer spoil a word or the poet's rhythm for the musician's sake than I would let an actor who, as Colley Cibber said, "should be tied to time and tune like a singer," spoil the poet's rhythm that he might give to a word what seemed to him a greater weight of drama. The labour of two players, Miss Florence Farr and Mr. Frank Fay, have done enough to show that all is possible, if the summer be lucky and the corn ripen.

W. B. YEATS.

December, 1906.

CONTENTS

THE COUNTESS CATHLEEN	PAGE
Act I	5
Act II	35
Act III	57
Act IV	99
THE LAND OF HEART'S DESIRE	133
THE SHADOWY WATERS	179
ON BAILE'S STRAND	251
THE KING'S THRESHOLD	323
DEIRDRE	409
APPENDIX I	
The Legendary and Mythological Founda- tion of the Plays and Poems	481
APPENDIX II	
The Dates and Places of Performance of the Plays	484
APPENDIX III	
Acting Version of The Shadowy Waters	489
APPENDIX IV	
The Work of the National Theatre Society at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin : A State- ment of Principles	513

THE COUNTESS CATHLEEN

MAIRE, *wife of SHEMUS RUA.*

TEIG, *his son.*

SHEMUS RUA, *a peasant.*

MUSICIANS.

ALEEL, *a young bard.*

THE COUNTESS CATHLEEN.

OONA, *her foster-mother.*

TWO DEMONS disguised as MERCHANTS.

MAURTEEN, *a gardener.*

PEASANTS, SERVANTS, etc.

ANGELICAL BEINGS, SPIRITS, and FAERIES.

The scene is laid in Ireland, and in old times.

ACT I

The cottage of SHEMUS RUA. The door into the open air is at right side of room. There is a window at one side of the door, and a little shrine of the Virgin Mother at the other. At the back is a door opening into a bedroom, and at the left side of the room a pantry door. A wood of oak, beech, hazel, and quicken is seen through the window half hidden in vapour and twilight. MAIRE watches TEIG, who fills a pot with water. He stops as if to listen, and spills some of the water.

MAIRE. You are all thumbs.

TEIG. Hear how the dog bays, mother,

And how the gray hen flutters in the coop.
Strange things are going up and down the
land,

These famine times: by Tubber-vanach cross-
roads

A woman met a man with ears spread out,
And they moved up and down like wings of
bats.

MAIRE. Shemus stays late.

TEIG. By Carrick-orus churchyard,
A herdsman met a man who had no mouth,
Nor ears, nor eyes: his face a wall of flesh;
He saw him plainly by the moon.

MAIRE [*going over to the little shrine*].

White Mary,
Bring Shemus home out of the wicked
woods;

Save Shemus from the wolves; Shemus is
daring;

And save him from the demons of the woods,
Who have crept out and wander on the roads,
Deluding dim-eyed souls now newly dead,
And those alive who have gone crazed with
famine.

Save him, White Mary Virgin.

TEIG.

And but now

I thought I heard far-off tympani and
harps.

[*Knocking at the door.*]

MAIRE. Shemus has come.

TEIG.

May he bring better food

Than the lean crow he brought us yesterday.

[MAIRE *opens the door, and SHEMUS comes*
in with a dead wolf on his shoulder.]

MAIRE. Shemus, you are late home: you
have been lounging
And chattering with some one: you know
well
How the dreams trouble me, and how I
pray,
Yet you lie sweating on the hill from
morn,
Or linger at the crossways with all comers,
Telling or gathering up calamity.

SHEMUS. You would rail my head off.

Here is a good dinner.

[He throws the wolf on the table.]

A wolf is better than a carrion crow.
I searched all day: the mice and rats and
hedge-hogs
Seemed to be dead, and I could hardly hear

A wing moving in all the famished woods,
Though the dead leaves and claubers of four
forests

Cling to my footsole. I turned home but now,
And saw, sniffing the floor in a bare cow-
house,

This young wolf here: the crossbow brought
him down.

MAIRE. Praise be the saints!

[After a pause.]

Why did the house dog bay?

SHEMUS. He heard me coming and smelt
food — what else?

TEIG. We will not starve awhile.

SHEMUS. What food is within?

TEIG. There is a bag half full of meal, a pan
Half full of milk.

SHEMUS. And we have one old hen.

TEIG. The bogwood were less hard.

MAIRE. Before you came

She made a great noise in the hencoop,

Shemus.

What fluttered in the window?

TEIG.

Two horned owls

Have blinked and fluttered on the window

sill

From when the dog began to bay.

SHEMUS.

Hush, hush.

*[He fits an arrow to the crossbow, and goes
towards the door. A sudden burst of
music without.]*

They are off again: ladies or gentlemen

Travel in the woods with tympan and with

harp.

Teig, put the wolf upon the biggest hook
And shut the door.

[TEIG goes into the cupboard with the wolf:
returns and fastens the door behind him.]

Sit on the creepy stool
And call up a whey face and a crying voice,
And let your head be bowed upon your knees.

[He opens the door of the cabin.]

Come in, your honours: a full score of
evenings

This threshold worn away by many a foot
Has been passed only by the snails and birds
And by our own poor hunger-shaken feet.

[The COUNTESS CATHLEEN, ALEEL, who
carries a small square harp, OONA, and a
little group of fantastically dressed musi-
cians come in.]

CATHLEEN. Are you so hungry?

TEIG [*from beside the fire*]. Lady, I fell
but now,

And lay upon the threshold like a log.

I have not tasted a crust for these four days.

[*The COUNTESS CATHLEEN empties her
purse on to the table.*]

CATHLEEN. Had I more money I would
give it you,

But we have passed by many cabins to-day;

And if you come to-morrow to my house

You shall have twice the sum. I am the
owner

Of a long empty castle in these woods.

MAIRE. Then you are Countess Cathleen:
you and yours

Are ever welcome under my poor thatch.

Will you sit down and warm you by the
sods?

CATHLEEN. We must find out this castle
in the wood

Before the chill o' the night.

[The musicians begin to tune their instruments.]

Do not blame me,
Good woman, for the tympan and the
harp:

I was bid fly the terror of the times
And wrap me round with music and sweet
song

Or else pine to my grave. I have lost my
way;

Aleel, the poet, who should know these
woods,

Because we met him on their border but now
Wandering and singing like the foam of the
sea,

Is so wrapped up in dreams of terrors to
come

That he can give no help.

MAIRE [*going to the door with her*].

You're almost there.

There is a trodden way among the hazels
,
That brings your servants to their marketing.

ALEEL. When we are gone draw to the
door and the bolt,

For, till we lost them half an hour ago,
Two gray horned owls hooted above our
heads

Of terrors to come. Tympan and harp
awake!

For though the world drift from us like a
sigh,

Music is master of all under the moon;

And play "The Wind that blows by Cummen
Strand." [Music.]

[Sings]

Impetuous heart, be still, be still:

Your sorrowful love may never be told;

Cover it up with a lonely tune.

He who could bend all things to His will

Has covered the door of the infinite fold

*With the pale stars and the wandering
moon.*

[While he is singing the COUNTESS CATH-
LEEN, OONA, and the musicians go out.]

ALEEL. Shut to the door and shut the
woods away,

For, till they had vanished in the thick of
the leaves,

Two gray horned owls hooted above our heads. [*He goes out.*]

MAIRE [*bolting the door*]. When wealthy and
wise folk wander from their peace
And fear wood things, poor folk may draw
the bolt

And pray before the fire.

[SHEMUS counts out the money, and rings a piece upon the table.]

SHEMUS. The Mother of God,
Hushed by the waving of the immortal
wings,
Has dropped in a doze and cannot hear the
poor :

I passed by Margaret Nolan's; for nine days

Her mouth was green with dock and dandelion;

And now they wake her.

MAIRE. I will go the next;

Our parents' cabins bordered the same field.

SHEMUS. God, and the Mother of God,
have dropped asleep,

For they are weary of the prayers and
candles;

But Satan pours the famine from his bag,

And I am mindful to go pray to him

To cover all this table with red gold.

TEIG, will you dare me to it?

TEIG. Not I, father.

MAIRE. O Shemus, hush, maybe your
mind might pray

In spite o' the mouth.

SHEMUS. Two crowns and twenty pennies.

MAIRE. Is yonder quicken wood?

SHEMUS [*picking the bough from the table*].

He swayed about,

And so I tied him to a quicken bough

And slung him from my shoulder.

MAIRE [*taking the bough from him*]. Shemus

Shemus!

What, would you burn the blessed quicken
wood?

A spell to ward off demons and ill faeries.

You know not what the owls were that peeped
in,

For evil wonders live in this old wood,

And they can show in what shape please
them best.

And we have had no milk to leave of nights

To keep our own good people kind to us.
And Aleel, who has talked with the great
 Sidhe,
Is full of terrors to come.

[She lays the bough on a chair.]

SHEMUS. I would eat my supper
With no less mirth if squatting by the
 hearth

Were dulacaun, or demon of the pit
Clawing its knees, its hoof among the ashes.

*[He rings another piece of money. A sound
of footsteps outside the door.]*

MAIRE. Who knows what evil you have
 brought to us?

I fear the wood things, Shemus.

[A knock at the door.]

Do not open.

SHEMUS. A crown and twenty pennies are
not enough

To stop the hole that lets the famine in.

[The little shrine falls.]

MAIRE. Look ! look !

SHEMUS *[crushing it under foot]*. The Mother
of God has dropped asleep,
And all her household things have gone to
wrack.

MAIRE. O Mary, Mother of God, be piti-
ful !

*[SHEMUS opens the door. TWO MERCHANTS
stand without. They have bands of gold
round their foreheads, and each carries a
bag upon his shoulder.]*

FIRST MERCHANT. Have you food here ?

SHEMUS. For those who can pay well.

SECOND MERCHANT. We are rich merchants
seeking merchandise.

SHEMUS. Come in, your honours.

MAIRE. No, do not come in:

We have no food, not even for ourselves.

FIRST MERCHANT. There is a wolf on the
big hook in the cupboard. [*They enter.*]

SHEMUS. Forgive her: she is not used to
quality,

And is half crazed with being much alone.

How did you know I had taken a young wolf?

Fine wholesome food, though maybe some-
what strong.

[*The SECOND MERCHANT sits down by the fire
and begins rubbing his hands. The FIRST
MERCHANT stands looking at the quicken
bough on the chair.*]

FIRST MERCHANT. I would rest here: the
night is somewhat chilly,
And my feet footsore going up and down
From land to land and nation unto nation:
The fire burns dimly; feed it with this bough.

[SHEMUS *throws the bough into the fire. The*

FIRST MERCHANT *sits down on the chair.*

*The MERCHANTS' chairs are on each side of
the fire. The table is between them. Each
lays his bag before him on the table. The
night has closed in somewhat, and the
main light comes from the fire.]*

MAIRE. What have you in the bags?

SHEMUS. Don't mind her, sir,
Women grow curious and feather-thoughted
Through being in each other's company
More than is good for them.

FIRST MERCHANT. Our bags are full
Of golden pieces to buy merchandise.

*[They pour gold pieces on to the table out of
their bags. It is covered with the gold
pieces. They shine in the firelight. MAIRE
goes to the door of the pantry, and watches
the MERCHANTS, muttering to herself.]*

TEIG. These are great gentlemen.

FIRST MERCHANT *[taking a stone bottle out
of his bag]*. Come to the fire,
Here is the headiest wine you ever tasted.

SECOND MERCHANT. Wine that can hush
asleep the petty war
Of good and evil, and awake instead
A scented flame flickering above that peace
The bird of prey knows well in his deep
heart.

SHEMUS [*bringing drinking-cups*]. I do not
understand you, but your wine
Sets me athirst: its praise made your eyes
lighten.

I am thirsting for it.

FIRST MERCHANT. Ay, come drink and
drink,

I bless all mortals who drink long and deep.
My curse upon the salt-strewn road of monks.

[TEIG and SHEMUS *sit down at the table
and drink.*]

TEIG. You must have seen rare sights and
done rare things.

FIRST MERCHANT. What think you of the
master whom we serve?

SHEMUS. I have grown weary of my days
in the world

Because I do not serve him.

FIRST MERCHANT.

More of this

When we have eaten, for we love right well

A merry meal, a warm and leaping fire

And easy hearts.

SHEMUS. Come, Maire, and cook the wolf.

MAIRE. I will not cook for you.

SHEMUS.

Maire is mad.

[TEIG and SHEMUS stand up and stagger about.]

That wine is the suddenest wine man ever
tasted.

MAIRE. I will not cook for you: you are
not human:

Before you came two horned owls looked at
us;

The dog bayed, and the tongue of Shemus
maddened.

When you came in the Virgin's blessed shrine
Fell from its nail, and when you sat down
here

You poured out wine as the wood sidheogs do
When they'd entice a soul out of the world.
Why did you come to us? Was not death
near?

FIRST MERCHANT. We are two merchants.

MAIRE. If you be not demons
Go and give alms among the starving poor,
You seem more rich than any under the moon.

FIRST MERCHANT. If we knew where to find
deserving poor,
We would give alms.

MAIRE. Then ask of Father John.

FIRST MERCHANT. We know the evils of
mere charity,

And have been planning out a wiser way.

Let each man bring one piece of merchandise.

MAIRE. And have the starving any merchandise?

FIRST MERCHANT. We do but ask what each man has.

MAIRE. Merchants,
Their swine and cattle, fields and implements,
Are sold and gone.

FIRST MERCHANT. They have not sold all yet.

MAIRE. What have they?

FIRST MERCHANT. They have still
their souls.

[MAIRE shrieks. *He beckons to TEIG and*
SHEMUS.]

Come hither.

See you these little golden heaps? Each one
Is payment for a soul. From charity
We give so great a price for those poor
flames.

Say to all men we buy men's souls — away.

[They do not stir.]

This pile is for you and this one here for
you,

MAIRE. Shemus and Teig, Teig —

TEIG. Out of the way.

[SHEMUS and TEIG take the money.]

FIRST MERCHANT. Cry out at cross-roads
and at chapel doors

And market-places that we buy men's souls,
Giving so great a price that men may live
In mirth and ease until the famine ends.

[TEIG and SHEMUS go out.]

MAIRE [*kneeling*]. Destroyers of souls, may
God destroy you quickly!

FIRST MERCHANT. No curse can overthrow the immortal demons.

MAIRE. You shall at last dry like dry
leaves, and hang
Nailed like dead vermin to the doors of
God.

FIRST MERCHANT. You shall be ours.
This famine shall not cease.
You shall eat grass, and dock, and dandelion,
And fail till this stone threshold seem a wall,
And when your hands can scarcely drag your
body
We shall be near you.

[*To SECOND MERCHANT.*]

Bring the meal out.

[*The SECOND MERCHANT brings the bag of meal from the pantry.*]

Burn it. [MAIRE faints.]

Now she has swooned, our faces go unscratched;

Bring me the gray hen too.

[*The SECOND MERCHANT goes out through the door and returns with the hen strangled. He flings it on the floor. While he is away the FIRST MERCHANT makes up the fire. The FIRST MERCHANT then fetches the pan of milk from the pantry, and spills it on the ground. He returns, and brings out the wolf, and throws it down by the hen.*]

These need much burning.

This stool and this chair here will make good fuel. [He begins breaking the chair.]

My master will break up the sun and moon
And quench the stars in the ancestral night
And overturn the thrones of God and the
angels.

ACT II

A great hall in the castle of the COUNTESS CATHLEEN. There is a large window at the farther end, through which the forest is visible. The wall to the right juts out slightly, cutting off an angle of the room. A flight of stone steps leads up to a small arched door in the jutting wall. Through the door can be seen a little oratory. The hall is hung with ancient tapestry, representing the loves and wars and huntings of the Fenian and Red Branch heroes. There are doors to the right and left. On the left side OONA sits, as if asleep, beside a spinning-wheel. The COUNTESS CATHLEEN stands farther back

*and more to the right, close to a group of
the musicians, still in their fantastic dresses,
who are playing a merry tune.*

CATHLEEN. Be silent, I am tired of tympan
and harp,
And tired of music that but cries "sleep,
sleep,"
Till joy and sorrow and hope and terror are
gone.

[*The COUNTESS CATHLEEN goes over to OONA.*]
You were asleep?

OONA. No, child, I was but thinking
Why you have grown so sad.

CATHLEEN. The famine frets me.

OONA. I have lived now near ninety
winters, child,

And I have known three things no doctor
cures —

Love, loneliness, and famine; nor found
refuge

Other than growing old and full of sleep.

See you where Oisín and young Niamh ride
Wrapped in each other's arms, and where the
Fenians

Follow their hounds along the fields of tapes-
try;

How merry they lived once, yet men died
then.

Sit down by me, and I will chaunt the
song

About the Danaan nations in their raths
That Aleel sang for you by the great door
Before we lost him in the shadow of leaves.

CATHLEEN. No, sing the song he sang in
the dim light,
When we first found him in the shadow of
leaves,
About King Fergus in his brazen car
Driving with troops of dancers through the
woods.

*[She crouches down on the floor, and lays
her head on OONA'S knees.]*

OONA. Dear heart, make a soft cradle of
old tales,
And songs, and music : wherefore should you
sadden
For wrongs you cannot hinder? The great
God
Smiling condemns the lost : be mirthful : He
Bids you be merry and old age be wise.

CATHLEEN. Tympan and harp awaken wandering dreams.

A VOICE [*without*]. You may not see the Countess.

ANOTHER VOICE. I must see her.

[*Sound of a slight struggle. A SERVANT enters from door to R.*]

SERVANT. The gardener is resolved to speak with you.

I cannot stay him.

CATHLEEN. You may come, Maurteen.

[*The GARDENER, an old man, comes in from the R., and the SERVANT goes out.*]

GARDENER. Forgive my working clothes and the dirt on me.

I bring ill words, your ladyship — too bad
To send with any other.

CATHLEEN. These bad times,
Can any news be bad or any good?

GARDENER. A crowd of ugly lean-faced
 rogues last night;
And may God curse them! climbed the
 garden wall.
There is scarce an apple now on twenty
 trees,
And my asparagus and strawberry beds
Are trampled into claubers, and the boughs
Of peach and plum-trees broken and torn
 down
For some last fruit that hung there. My
 dog, too,
My old blind Simon, him who had no tail,
They murdered — God's red anger seize
 them!

CATHLEEN. I know how pears and all the
tribe of apples
Are daily in your love — how this ill
chance

Is sudden doomsday fallen on your year;
So do not say no matter. I but say
I blame the famished season, and not you.
Then be not troubled.

GARDENER. I thank your ladyship.

CATHLEEN. What rumours and what portents
of the famine?

GARDENER. The yellow vapour, in whose
folds it came,
That creeps along the hedges at nightfall,
Rots all the heart out of my cabbages.
I pray against it.

[He goes towards the door, then pauses.]

If her ladyship
Would give me an old crossbow, I would
watch
Behind a bush and guard the pears of
nights
And make a hole in somebody I know of.

CATHLEEN. They will give you a long
draught of ale below.

[*The GARDENER goes out.*]

OONA. What did he say? — he stood on
my deaf side.

CATHLEEN. His apples are all stolen. Pruning time,
And the slow ripening of his pears and apples,
For him is a long, heart-moving history.

OONA. Now lay your head once more upon
my knees.

I will sing how Fergus drove his brazen cars.

[*She chaunts with the thin voice of age.*]

*Who will go drive with Fergus now,
And pierce the deep wood's woven shade,
And dance upon the level shore?
Young man, lift up your russet brow,
And lift your tender eyelids, maid,
And brood on hopes and fears no more.*

You have dropped down again into your
trouble.

You do not hear me.

CATHLEEN. Ah, sing on, old Oona,
I hear the horn of Fergus in my heart.

OONA. I do not know the meaning of the
song.

I am too old.

CATHLEEN. The horn is calling, calling.

OONA. *And no more turn aside and brood
Upon Love's bitter mystery;
For Fergus rules the brazen cars,
And rules the shadows of the wood,
And the white breast of the dim sea
And all dishevelled wandering stars.*

THE SERVANT'S VOICE [*without*]. The
Countess Cathleen must not be disturbed.

ANOTHER VOICE. Man, I must see her.

CATHLEEN. Who now wants me, Paudeen?

SERVANT [*from the door*]. A herdsman and
his history.

CATHLEEN. He may come.

[*The HERDSMAN enters from the door to R.*]

HERDSMAN. Forgive this dusty gear: I
have come far.

My sheep were taken from the fold last night.

You will be angry : I am not to blame.

But blame these robbing times.

CATHLEEN. No blame's with you.

I blame the famine.

HERDSMAN. Kneeling, I give thanks.

When gazing on your face, the poorest, Lady,

Forget their poverty, the rich their care.

CATHLEEN. What rumours and what portents
 of the famine?

HERDSMAN. As I came down the lane by
 Tubber-vanach

A boy and man sat cross-legged on two stones,

With moving hands and faces famine-thin,

Gabbling to crowds of men and wives and

boys

Of how two merchants at a house in the

woods

Buy souls for hell, giving so great a price
That men may live through all the dearth in
plenty.

The vales are famine crazy — I am right glad
My home is on the mountain near to God.

[He turns to go.]

CATHLEEN. They will give you ale and
meat before you go.

You must have risen at dawn to come so far.
Keep your bare mountain — let the world
drift by,

The burden of its wrongs rests not on you.

HERDSMAN. I am content to serve your
ladyship.

[He goes.]

OONA. What did he say? — he stood on
my deaf side.

He seemed to give you word of woful things.

CATHLEEN. A story born out of the dream-
ing eyes

And crazy brain and credulous ears of famine.

O, I am sadder than an old air, Oona,

My heart is longing for a deeper peace

Than Fergus found amid his brazen cars :

Would that like Edain my first forbear's
daughter

Who followed once a twilight's piercing tune,

I could go down and dwell among the Sidhe

In their old ever-busy honeyed land.

OONA. You should not say such things —
they bring ill-luck.

CATHLEEN. The image of young Edain on
the arras,

Walking along, one finger lifted up ;

And that wild song of the unending dance

Of the dim Danaan nations in their raths,
Young Aleel sang for me by the great door,
Before we lost him in the shadow of leaves,
Have filled me full of all these wicked
words.

*[The SERVANT enters hastily, followed by
three men. Two are peasants.]*

SERVANT. The steward of the castle brings
two men
To talk with you.

STEWARD. And tell the strangest story
The mouth of man has uttered.

CATHLEEN. More food taken;
Yet learned theologians have laid down
That he who has no food, offending no way,
May take his meat and bread from too-full
larders.

FIRST PEASANT. We come to make amends
for robbery.

I stole five hundred apples from your trees,
And laid them in a hole; and my friend here
Last night stole two large mountain sheep of
yours

And hung them on a beam under his thatch.

SECOND PEASANT. His words are true.

FIRST PEASANT. Since then our luck has
changed.

As I came down the lane by Tubber-vanach
I fell on Shemus Rua and his son,
And they led me where two great gentlemen
Buy souls for money, and they bought my
soul.

I told my friend here — my friend also
trafficked.

SECOND PEASANT. His words are true.

FIRST PEASANT. Now people throng to
sell,

Noisy as seagulls tearing a dead fish.

There soon will be no man or woman's soul
Unbargained for in fivescore baronies.

SECOND PEASANT. His words are true.

FIRST PEASANT. When we had sold we
talked,

And having no more comfortable life

Than this that makes us warm — our souls
being bartered

For all this money.

SECOND PEASANT. And this money here ;

*[They bring handfuls of money from their
pockets. CATHLEEN starts up.]*

And fearing much to hang for robbery,

We come to pay you for the sheep and
fruit,

How do you price them?

CATHLEEN. Gather up your money.

Think you that I would touch the demons'
gold?

Begone, give twice, thrice, twenty times their
money,

And buy your souls again. I will pay
all.

FIRST PEASANT. We will not buy our souls
again: a soul

But keeps the flesh out of its merriment.

We shall be merry and drunk from moon till
moon.

Keep from our way. Let no one stop our
way. [*They go.*]

CATHLEEN [*to servant*]. Follow and bring them here again — beseech them.

[*The SERVANT goes.*]

[*To STEWARD.*]

Steward, you know the secrets of this house.
How much have I in gold?

STEWARD. A hundred thousand.

CATHLEEN. How much have I in castles?

STEWARD. As much more.

CATHLEEN. How much have I in pastures?

STEWARD. As much more.

CATHLEEN. How much have I in forests?

STEWARD. As much more.

CATHLEEN. Keeping this house alone, sell
all I have;

Go to some distant country and come again
With many herds of cows and ships of grain.

STEWARD. God's blessing light upon your
ladyship;

You will have saved the land.

CATHLEEN. Make no delay. [*He goes.*]

[*Enter SERVANT.*]

How did you thrive? Say quickly. You are
pale.

SERVANT. Their eyes burn like the eyes of
birds of prey

I did not dare go near.

CATHLEEN. God pity them!

Bring all the old and ailing to this house,

For I will have no sorrow of my own

From this day onward.

[*The SERVANT goes out. Some of the musicians follow him, some linger in the doorway. The COUNTESS CATHLEEN kneels beside OONA.*]

Can you tell me, mother,
How I may mend the times, how stanch this
wound

That bleeds in the earth, how overturn the
famine,

How drive these demons to their darkness
again?

OONA. The demons hold our hearts be-
tween their hands,
For the apple is in our blood, and though
heart break

There is no medicine but Michael's trump.

Till it has ended parting and old age

And hail and rain and famine and foolish
laughter;

The dead are happy, the dust is in their ears.

ACT III

Hall of the COUNTESS CATHLEEN, *as before.*

SERVANT *enters and goes towards the oratory door.*

SERVANT. Here is yet another would see
your ladyship.

CATHLEEN [*within*]. Who calls me?

SERVANT. There is a man would speak with
you,

And by his face he has some pressing news,
Some moving tale.

CATHLEEN [*coming to chapel door*]. I cannot rest or pray,

For all day long the messengers run hither
On one another's heels, and every message

More evil than the one that had gone before.

Who is the messenger?

SERVANT.

Aleel, the poet.

CATHLEEN. There is no hour he is not
welcome to me,

Because I know of nothing but a harp string
That can remember happiness.

[SERVANT *goes out and ALEEL comes in.*]

And now

I grow forgetful of evil for awhile.

ALEEL. I have come to bid you leave this
castle, and fly

Out of these woods.

CATHLEEN.

What evil is there here,
That is not everywhere from this to the sea?

ALEEL. They who have sent me walk
invisible.

CATHLEEN. Men say that the wise people
of the raths

Have given you wisdom.

ALEEL. I lay in the dusk

Upon the grassy margin of a lake

Among the hills, where none of mortal
creatures

But the swan comes—my sleep became a fire.

One walked in the fire with birds about his
head.

CATHLEEN. Ay, Aengus of the birds.

ALEEL. He may be Aengus,

But it may be he bears an angelical name.

Lady, he bid me call you from these woods;

He bids you bring Oona, your foster-mother,

And some few serving-men and live in the
hills

Among the sounds of music and the light
Of waters till the evil days are gone.

[*He kneels.*]

For here some terrible death is waiting you ;
Some unimaginable evil, some great darkness
That fable has not dreamt of, nor sun nor
moon
Scattered.

CATHLEEN. And he had birds about his
head ?

ALEEL. Yes, yes, white birds. He bids
you leave this house

With some old trusty serving-man, who will
feed

All that are starving and shelter all that
wander

While there is food and house room.

CATHLEEN.

He bids me go

Where none of mortal creatures but the

swan

Dabbles, and there you would pluck the harp

when the trees

Had made a heavy shadow about our door,

And talk among the rustling of the reeds

When night hunted the foolish sun away,

With stillness and pale tapers. No — no —

no.

I cannot. Although I weep, I do not weep

Because that life would be most happy, and

here

I find no way, no end. Nor do I weep

Because I had longed to look upon your face,

But that a night of prayer has made me

weary.

ALEEL [*throwing his arms about her feet*].

Let Him that made mankind, the angels
and devils

And death and plenty mend what He has
made,

For when we labour in vain and eye still sees
Heart breaks in vain.

CATHLEEN. How would that quiet end?

ALEEL. How but in healing?

CATHLEEN. You have seen my tears.

And I can see your hand shake on the floor.

ALEEL [*faltering*]. I thought but of healing.

He was angelical.

CATHLEEN [*turning away from him*]. No,
not angelical, but of the old gods,

Who wander about the world to waken the
heart —

The passionate, proud heart that all the
angels

Leaving nine heavens empty would rock to
sleep.

*[She goes to the chapel door; ALEEL holds his
clasped hands towards her for a moment
hesitatingly, and then lets them fall beside
him.]*

Do not hold out to me beseeching hands.

This heart shall never waken on earth. I
have sworn

By her whose heart the seven sorrows have
pierced

To pray before this altar until my heart

Has grown to Heaven like a tree, and there

Rustled its leaves till Heaven has saved my
people.

ALEEL [*who has risen*]. When one so great
has spoken of love to one

So little as I, although to deny him love,
What can he but hold out beseeching hands
Then let them fall beside him, knowing how
greatly

They have overdared?

[*He goes towards the door of the hall. The
COUNTESS CATHLEEN takes a few steps
towards him.*]

CATHLEEN. If the old tales are true
Queens have wed shepherds and kings beggar
maids;
God's procreant waters flowing about your
mind
Have made you more than kings or queens;
and not you

But I am the empty pitcher.

ALEEL.

Being silent,

I have said all — farewell, farewell; and yet
no,

Give me your hand to kiss.

CATHLEEN.

I kiss your brow,

But will not say farewell. I am often weary,
And I would hear the harp-string.

ALEEL.

I cannot stay,

For I would hide my sorrow among the
hills —

Listen, listen the hills are calling me.

[They listen for a moment.]

CATHLEEN. I hear the cry of curlew.

ALEEL.

Then I will out

Where I can hear wind cry and water cry
And curlew cry: how does the saying go

That calls them the three oldest cries in the
world?

Farewell, farewell, I will go wander among
them,

Because there is no comfort under a roof-tree.

[He goes out.]

CATHLEEN *[looking through the door after
him]*. I cannot see him. He has come
to the great door.

I must go pray. Would that my heart and
mind

Were as little shaken as this candle-light.

*[She goes into the chapel. The Two MER-
CHANTS enter.]*

SECOND MERCHANT. Who was the man that
came from the great door

While we were still in the shadow?

FIRST MERCHANT. Aleel, her lover.

SECOND MERCHANT. It may be that he has
turned her thought from us

And we can gather our merchandise in
peace.

FIRST MERCHANT. No, no, for she is kneel-
ing.

SECOND MERCHANT. Shut the door.

Are all our drudges here?

FIRST MERCHANT [*closing the chapel door*].

I bid them follow.

Can you not hear them breathing upon the
stairs?

I have sat this hour under the elder-tree.

SECOND MERCHANT. I had bid you rob her
treasury, and yet

I found you sitting drowsed and motionless,

Your chin bowed to your knees, while on all
sides,
Bat-like from bough and roof and window-
ledge,
Clung evil souls of men, and in the woods,
Like streaming flames floated upon the winds,
The elemental creatures.

FIRST MERCHANT. I have fared ill,
She prayed so hard I could not cross the
threshold
Till this young man had turned her prayer
to dreams.

You have had a man to kill, how have you
fared?

SECOND MERCHANT. I lay in the image of a
nine-monthed bonyeen,
By Tubber-vanach cross-roads: Father John

Came, sad and moody, murmuring many
prayers;

I seemed as though I came from his own styè;
He saw the one brown ear; the breviary
dropped;

He ran; I ran, I ran into the quarry,
He fell a score of yards.

FIRST MERCHANT. Now that he is dead
We shall be too much thronged with souls
to-morrow.

Did his soul escape you?

SECOND MERCHANT. I thrust it in the bag.
But the hand that blessed the poor and raised
the Host

Tore through the leather with sharp piety.

FIRST MERCHANT. Well, well, to labour —
here is the treasury door.

[They go out by the left-hand door, and enter again in a little while, carrying full bags upon their shoulders.]

FIRST MERCHANT. Brave thought, brave
thought — a shining thought of mine!
She now no more may bribe the poor — no
more
Cheat our great master of his merchan-
dise,
While our heels dangle at the house in the
woods,
And grass grows on the threshold, and snails
crawl
Along the window-pane and the mud floor.
Brother, where wander all these dwarfish
folk,
Hostile to men, the people of the tides?

SECOND MERCHANT [*going to the door*]. They
are gone. They have already wandered
away,

Unwilling labourers.

FIRST MERCHANT. I will call them hither.

[*He opens the window.*]

Come hither, hither, hither, water folk :

Come all you elemental populace ;

Leave lonely the long-hoarding surges : leave

The cymbals of the waves to clash alone,

And, shaking the sea tangles from your hair,

Gather about us. [*After a pause.*]

I can hear a sound

As from waves beating upon distant strands ;

And the sea creatures, like a surf of light,

Pour eddying through the pathways of the
oaks ;

And as they come, the sentient grass and
leaves

Bow towards them, and the tall, drouth-
jaded oaks

Fondle the murmur of their flying feet.

SECOND MERCHANT. The green things love
unknotted hearts and minds;

And neither one with angels or with us,

Nor risen in arms with evil nor with good,

In laughter roves the litter of the waves.

*[A crowd of faces fill up the darkness outside
the window. A figure separates from the
others and speaks.]*

THE SPIRIT. We come unwillingly, for she
whose gold

We must now carry to the house in the
wood

Is dear to all our race. On the green plain,
Beside the sea, a hundred shepherds live
To mind her sheep; and when the nightfall
comes

They leave a hundred pans of white ewes'
milk

Outside their doors, to feed us when the
dawn

Has driven us out of Finbar's ancient
house,

And broken the long dance under the hill.

FIRST MERCHANT [*making a sign upon the
air*]. Obey! I make a sign upon your
hearts.

THE SPIRIT. The sign of evil burns upon
our hearts,

And we obey.

[They crowd through the window, and take out of the bags a small bag each. They are dressed in green robes and have ruddy hair. They are a little less than the size of men and women.]

FIRST MERCHANT. And now begone — begone!
[They go.]

I bid them go, for, being garrulous
And flighty creatures, they had soon begun
To deafen us with their sea gossip. Now
We must go bring more money. Brother,
brother,
I long to see my master's face again,
For I turn homesick.

SECOND MERCHANT. I too tire of toil.

[They go out, and return as before, with their bags full.]

SECOND MERCHANT [*pointing to the oratory*].

How may we gain this woman for our
lord?

This pearl, this turquoise fastened in his
crown

Would make it shine like His we dare not
name.

Now that the winds are heavy with our kind,
Might we not kill her, and bear off her spirit
Before the mob of angels were astir?

[*A diadem and a heap of jewels fall from the
bag.*]

FIRST MERCHANT. Who tore the bag?

SECOND MERCHANT. The finger of priest
John

When he fled through the leather. I had
thought

Because his was an old and little spirit
The tear would hardly matter.

FIRST MERCHANT. This comes, brother,
Of stealing souls that are not rightly ours.
If we would win this turquoise for our lord,
It must go dropping down of its freewill.
She will have heard the noise. She will
 stifle us
With holy names.

*[He goes to the oratory door and opens it a
 little, and then closes it.]*

No, she has fallen asleep.

SECOND MERCHANT. The noise wakened
 the household. While you spoke
I heard chairs moved, and heard their
 shuffling feet.
And now they are coming hither.

A VOICE [*within*]. It was here.

ANOTHER VOICE. No, further away.

ANOTHER VOICE. It was in the western tower.

ANOTHER VOICE. Come quickly; we will
search the western tower.

FIRST MERCHANT. We still have time —
they search the distant rooms.

Call hither the fading and the unfading fires.

SECOND MERCHANT [*going to the window*].

There are none here. They tired and
strayed from hence —

Unwilling labourers.

FIRST MERCHANT. I will draw them in.

[He cries through the window.]

Come hither, you lost souls of men, who died
In drunken sleep, and by each other's hands

When they had bartered you — come hither
all

Who mourn among the scenery of your
sins,

Turning to animal and reptile forms,

The visages of passions; hither, hither —

Leave marshes and the reed-encumbered
pools,

You shapeless fires, that were the souls of
men,

And are a fading wretchedness.

SECOND MERCHANT. They come not.

FIRST MERCHANT [*making a sign upon the
air*]. Come hither, hither, hither.

SECOND MERCHANT. I can hear

A crying as of storm-distempered reeds.

The fading and the unfading fires rise up

Like steam out of the earth; the grass and
leaves

Shiver and shrink away and sway about,
Blown by unnatural gusts of ice-cold air.

FIRST MERCHANT. They are one with all
the beings of decay,
Ill longings, madness, lightning, famine,
drouth.

*[The whole stage is gradually filled with vague
forms, some animal shapes, some human,
some mere lights.]*

Come you — and you — and you, and lift
these bags.

A SPIRIT. We are too violent; mere shapes
of storm.

FIRST MERCHANT. Come you — and you —
and you, and lift these bags.

A SPIRIT. We are too feeble, fading out of
life.

FIRST MERCHANT. Come you, and you,
who are the latest dead,
And still wear human shape: the shape of
power.

*[The two robbing peasants of the last scene
come forward. Their faces have withered
from much pain.]*

Now, brawlers, lift the bags of gold.

FIRST PEASANT. Yes, yes!

Unwillingly, unwillingly; for she,
Whose gold we bear upon our shoulders thus,
Has endless pity even for lost souls
In her good heart. At moments, now and
then,
When plunged in horror, brooding each alone,

A memory of her face floats in on us.
It brings a crowned misery, half repose,
And we wail one to other; we obey,
For heaven's many-angled star reversed,
Now sign of evil, burns into our hearts.

FIRST MERCHANT. When these pale sapphires and these diadems
And these small bags of money are in our house,
The burning shall give over — now be-gone.

SECOND MERCHANT [*lifting the diadem to put it upon his head*]. No — no — no
I will carry the diadem.

FIRST MERCHANT. No, brother, not yet.
For none can carry her treasures wholly away

But spirits that are too light for good and
evil,

Or, being evil, can remember good.

Begone. I bade them go, for they are lonely,
And when they see ought living love to sigh.

[Pointing to the oratory.]

Brother, I heard a sound in there — a sound
That troubles me.

SECOND MERCHANT *[going to the door of the
oratory and peering through it].* Upon
the altar steps

The Countess tosses, murmuring in her sleep
A broken paternoster.

*[The FIRST MERCHANT goes to the door and
stands beside him.]* She is grown still.

FIRST MERCHANT. A great plan floats into
my mind — no wonder,

For I come from the ninth and mightiest Hell,
Where all are kings. I will wake her from her
sleep,

And mix with all her thoughts, a thought to
serve. [He calls through the door.]

May we be well remembered in your prayers!

[The COUNTESS CATHLEEN wakes, and comes
to the door of the oratory. The MERCHANTS
descend into the room again. She stands
at the top of the stone steps.]

CATHLEEN. What would you, sirs?

FIRST MERCHANT. We are two merchant
men,

New come from foreign lands. We bring you
news.

Forgive our sudden entry: the great door
Was open, we came in to seek a face.

CATHLEEN. The door stands always open
to receive,

With kindly welcome, starved and sickly folk,
Or any who would fly the woful times.
Merchants, you bring me news.

FIRST MERCHANT. We saw a man
Heavy with sickness in the bog of Allan,
Whom you had bid buy cattle. Near Fair
Head

We saw your grain ships lying all becalmed
In the dark night, and not less still than
they
Burned all their mirrored lanthorns in the
sea.

CATHLEEN. My thanks to God, to Mary,
and the angels,
I still have bags of money, and can buy

Meal from the merchants who have stored it
up,

To prosper on the hungers of the poor.

You have been far, and know the sign of
things:

When will this yellow vapour no more hang
And creep about the fields, and this great
heat

Vanish away — and grass show its green
shoots?

FIRST MERCHANT. There is no sign of
change — day copies day,
Green things are dead — the cattle too are
dead,

Or dying — and on all the vapour hangs
And fattens with disease and glows with heat.
In you is all the hope of all the land.

CATHLEEN. And heard you of the demons
who buy souls? ^

FIRST MERCHANT. There are some men
who hold they have wolves' heads,
And say their limbs, dried by the infinite
flame,

Have all the speed of storms; others again
Say they are gross and little; while a few
Will have it they seem much as mortals are,
But tall and brown and travelled, like us,
lady.

Yet all agree a power is in their looks
That makes men bow, and flings a casting net
About their souls, and that all men would go
And barter those poor flames — their spirits
— only

You bribe them with the safety of your gold.

CATHLEEN. Praise be to God, to Mary, and
the angels,

That I am wealthy. Wherefore do they sell?

FIRST MERCHANT. The demons give a hun-
dred crowns and more

For a poor soul like his who lies asleep

By your great door under the porter's niche;

A little soul not worth a hundred pence.

But, for a soul like yours, I heard them say,

They would give five hundred thousand
crowns and more.

CATHLEEN. How can a heap of crowns pay
for a soul?

Is the green grave so terrible a thing?

FIRST MERCHANT. Some sell because the
money gleams, and some

Because they are in terror of the grave,

And some because their neighbours sold
before,

And some because there is a kind of joy
In casting hope away, in losing joy,
In ceasing all resistance, in at last
Opening one's arms to the eternal flames,
In casting all sails out upon the wind:
To this — full of the gaiety of the lost —
Would all folk hurry if your gold were gone.

CATHLEEN. There is a something, mer-
chant, in your voice
That makes me fear. When you were telling
how

A man may lose his soul and lose his God,
Your eyes lighted, and the strange weariness
That hangs about you vanished. When you
told

How my poor money serves the people —
both —

Merchants, forgive me — seemed to smile.

FIRST MERCHANT. Man's sins

Move us to laughter only, we have seen

So many lands and seen so many men.

How strange that all these people should be
swung

As on a lady's shoe-string — under them

The glowing leagues of never-ending flame.

CATHLEEN. There is a something in you
that I fear :

A something not of us. Were you not
born

In some most distant corner of the world?

[*The SECOND MERCHANT, who has been listen-
ing at the door to the right, comes forward,*

*and as he comes, a sound of voices and feet
is heard through the door to his left.]*

SECOND MERCHANT [*aside to FIRST MERCHANT*]. Away now — they are in the
passage — hurry,

For they will know us, and freeze up our
hearts

With Ave Marys, and burn all our skin
With holy water.

FIRST MERCHANT. Farewell: we must ride
Many a mile before the morning come;
Our horses beat the ground impatiently.

[They go out to R.]

*[A number of peasants enter at the same
moment by the opposite door.]*

CATHLEEN. What would you?

A PEASANT. As we nodded by the fire,

Telling old shannachus, we heard a noise
Of falling money. We have searched in vain.

CATHLEEN. You are too timid. I heard
naught at all.

THE OLD PEASANT. Ay, we are timid, for
a rich man's word
Can shake our houses, and a moon of drouth
Shrivel our seedlings in the barren earth;
We are the slaves of wind, and hail, and
flood;
Fear jogs our elbow in the market-place,
And nods beside us on the chimney-seat.
Ill-bodings are as native unto our hearts
As are their spots unto the woodpeckers.

CATHLEEN. You need not shake with
bodings in this house.

[OONA enters from the door to L.]

OONA. The treasure-room is broken in —
mavrone — mavrone;

The door stands open, and the gold is gone.

[The peasants raise a lamenting cry.]

CATHLEEN. Be silent. *[The cry ceases.]*

Saw you any one?

OONA.

Mavrone,

That my good mistress should lose all this
money.

CATHLEEN. You three upon my right hand,
ride and ride;

I will give a farm to him who finds the
thieves.

*[A man with keys at his girdle has entered
while she was speaking.]*

A PEASANT. The porter trembles

THE PORTER.

It is all no use;

Demons were here. I sat beside the door
In my stone niche, and two owls passed me by,
Whispering with human voices.

THE OLD PEASANT. God forsakes us.

CATHLEEN. Old man, old man, He never
closed a door

Unless one opened. I am desolate,
For a most sad resolve wakes in my heart:
But always I have faith. Old men and
women,

Be silent; He does not forsake the world,
But stands before it modelling in the clay
And moulding there His image. Age by age
The clay wars with His fingers and pleads
hard

For its old, heavy, dull, and shapeless ease;
At times it crumbles and a nation falls,

Now moves awry and demon hordes are born.

[*The peasants cross themselves.*]

But leave me now, for I am desolate,

I hear a whisper from beyond the thunder.

[*She steps down from the oratory door.*]

Yet stay an instant. When we meet again

I may have grown forgetful. Oona, take

These two — the larder and the dairy keys.

[*To THE OLD PEASANT.*]

But take you this. It opens the small room

Of herbs for medicine, of hellebore,

Of vervain, monkshood, plantain, and self-heal

And all the others; and the book of cures

Is on the upper shelf. You understand,

Because you doctored goats and cattle once.

THE OLD PEASANT. Why do you do this,
lady — did you see

Your coffin in a dream ?

CATHLEEN.

Ah, no, not that,

A sad resolve wakes in me. I have heard

A sound of wailing in unnumbered hovels,

And I must go down, down, I know not where.

Pray for the poor folk who are crazed with
famine ;

Pray, you good neighbours.

[*The peasants all kneel. The COUNTESS CATHLEEN ascends the steps to the door of the oratory, and, turning round, stands there motionless for a little, and then cries in a loud voice.*]

Mary, queen of angels,

And all you clouds on clouds of saints, fare-
well !

ACT IV

The cabin of SHEMUS RUA. The TWO MERCHANTS are sitting one at each end of the table, with rolls of parchment and many little heaps of gold before them. Through an open door, at the back, one sees into an inner room, in which there is a bed. On the bed is the body of MAIRE with candles about it.

FIRST MERCHANT. The woman may keep
robbing us no more,
For there are only mice now in her coffers.

SECOND MERCHANT. Last night, closed in
the image of an owl,
I hurried to the cliffs of Donegal,
And saw, creeping on the uneasy surge,

Those ships that bring the woman grain and
meal;

They are five days from us.

FIRST MERCHANT. I hurried East,
A gray owl flitting, flitting in the dew,
And saw nine hundred oxen toil through
Meath

Driven on by goads of iron; they, too, brother,
Are full five days from us.

SECOND MERCHANT. Five days for traffic.

*[While they have been speaking the peasants
have come in, led by TEIG and SHEMUS,
who take their stations, one on each side of
the door, and keep them marshalled into
rude order and encourage them from
time to time with gestures and whispered
words.]*

Here throng they; since the drouth they go
in throngs,
Like autumn leaves blown by the dreary
winds.

Come, deal — come, deal.

FIRST MERCHANT. Who will come deal
with us?

SHEMUS. They are out of spirit, sir, with
lack of food,

Save four or five. Here, sir, is one of these;
The others will gain courage in good time.

A MIDDLE-AGED MAN. I come to deal if
you give honest price.

FIRST MERCHANT [*reading in a parchment*].

John Maher, a man of substance, with dull
mind,

And quiet senses and unventurous heart.

The angels think him safe. Two hundred
crowns,

All for a soul, a little breath of wind.

THE MAN. I ask three hundred crowns.

You have read there,
That no mere lapse of days can make me yours.

FIRST MERCHANT. There is something more
writ here — often at night
He is wakeful from a dread of growing poor.
There is this crack in you — two hundred
crowns.

[THE MAN *takes them and goes.*]

SECOND MERCHANT. Come, deal — one
would half think you had no souls.
If only for the credit of your parishes,
Come, deal, deal, deal, or will you always
starve?

Maire, the wife of Shemus, would not deal,
She starved — she lies in there with red wall-
flowers,

And candles stuck in bottles, round her bed.

A WOMAN. What price, now, will you give
for mine?

FIRST MERCHANT. Ay, ay,

Soft, handsome, and still young — not much,
I think.

[Reading in the parchment.]

She has love letters in a little jar
On a high shelf between the pepper-pot
And wood-cased hour-glass.

THE WOMAN. O, the scandalous parch-
ment!

FIRST MERCHANT *[reading]*. She hides them
from her husband, who buys horses,

And is not much at home. You are almost
safe.

I give you fifty crowns. [*She turns to go.*]

A hundred, then.

[*She takes them, and goes into the crowd.*]

Come — deal, deal, deal; it is but for charity
We buy such souls at all; a thousand sins
Made them our master's long before we came.
Come, deal — come, deal. You seemed re-
solved to starve

Until your bones show through your skin.

Come deal,

Or live on nettles, grass, and dandelion.

Or do you dream the famine will go by?

The famine is hale and hearty; it is mine

And my great master's; it shall no wise cease

Until our purpose end: the yellow vapour

That brought it bears it over your dried fields
And fills with violent phantoms of the lost,
And grows more deadly as day copies day.
See how it dims the daylight. Is that peace
Known to the birds of prey so dread a thing?
They, and the souls obedient to our master,
And those who live with that great other spirit
Have gained an end, a peace, while you but
toss

And swing upon a moving balance beam.

[ALEEL enters, the wires of his harp are broken.]

ALEEL. Here, take my soul, for I am tired
of it;

I do not ask a price.

FIRST MERCHANT [*reading*]. A man of
songs:

Alone in the hushed passion of romance,

His mind ran all on sidheoges, and on tales
Of Fenian labours and the Red Branch kings,
And he cared nothing for the life of man :
But now all changes.

ALLEL. Ay, because her face,
The face of Countess Cathleen, dwells with me :
The sadness of the world upon her brow :
The crying of these strings grew burdensome,
Therefore I tore them ; see ; now take my
soul.

FIRST MERCHANT. We cannot take your
soul, for it is hers.

ALIEL. Ah, take it ; take it. It nowise can
help her
And, therefore, do I tire of it.

FIRST MERCHANT. No; no
We may not touch it.

ALEEL. Is your power so small,
Must I then bear it with me all my days?
May scorn close deep about you!

FIRST MERCHANT. Lead him hence;
He troubles me.

[TEIG and SHEMUS lead ALEEL into the crowd.]

SECOND MERCHANT. His gaze has filled me,
brother,
With shaking and a dreadful fear.

FIRST MERCHANT. Lean forward
And kiss the circlet where my master's
lips
Were pressed upon it when he sent us hither:
You will have peace once more.

[The SECOND MERCHANT kisses the gold circlet that is about the head of the FIRST MERCHANT.]

SHEMUS.

He is called Aleel,

And has been crazy now these many days;

But has no harm in him: his fits soon pass,

And one can go and lead him like a child.

FIRST MERCHANT. Come, deal, deal, deal,

deal, deal; you are all dumb?

SHEMUS. They say you beat the woman
down too low.

FIRST MERCHANT. I offer this great price:

a thousand crowns

For an old woman who was always ugly.

*[An old peasant woman comes forward, and
he takes up a parchment and reads.]*

There is but little set down here against her;

She stole fowl sometimes when the harvest
failed,

But always went to chapel twice a week,

And paid her dues when prosperous. Take
your money.

THE OLD PEASANT WOMAN [*curtseying*].

God bless you, sir. [*She screams.*]

O, sir, a pain went through me.

FIRST MERCHANT. That name is like a fire
to all damned souls.

Begone. [*She goes.*] See how the red gold
pieces glitter.

Deal: do you fear because an old hag
screamed?

Are you all cowards?

A PEASANT. Nay, I am no coward.

I will sell half my soul.

FIRST MERCHANT. How half your soul?

THE PEASANT. Half my chance of heaven.

FIRST MERCHANT. It is writ here

This man in all things takes the moderate
course,

He sits on midmost of the balance beam,
And no man has had good of him or evil.
Begone, we will not buy you.

SECOND MERCHANT. Deal, come deal.

FIRST MERCHANT. What, will you keep us
from our ancient home,
And from the eternal revelry? Come, deal,
And we will hence to our great master
again.

Come, deal, deal, deal.

THE PEASANTS SHOUT. The Countess Cath-
leen comes!

CATHLEEN [*entering*]. And so you trade
once more?

FIRST MERCHANT. In spite of you.

What brings you here, saint with the sapphire
eyes?

CATHLEEN. I come to barter a soul for a
great price.

FIRST MERCHANT. What matter if the soul
be worth the price?

CATHLEEN. The people starve, therefore the
people go

Thronging to you. I hear a cry come from
them,

And it is in my ears by night and day;

And I would have five hundred thousand
crowns,

That I may feed them till the dearth go
by;

And have the wretched spirits you have
bought

For your gold crowns, released, and sent to
God

The soul that I would barter is my soul.

A PEASANT. Do not, do not ; the souls of us
poor folk

Are not precious to God as your soul is.

O ! what would heaven do without you, lady ?

ANOTHER PEASANT. Look how their claws
clutch in their leathern gloves.

FIRST MERCHANT. Five hundred thousand
crowns ; we give the price,

The gold is here ; the spirits, while you speak,
Begin to labour upward, for your face
Sheds a great light on them and fills their
hearts

With whose unveilings of the fickle light,
Whereby our heavy labours have been marred

Since first His spirit moved upon the deeps
And stole them from us; even before this day
The souls were but half ours, for your bright
eyes

Had pierced them through and robbed them of
content.

But you must sign, for we omit no form
In buying a soul like yours; sign with this
quill;

It was a feather growing on the cock
That crowed when Peter dared deny his
Master,

And all who use it have great honour in hell.

[CATHLEEN *leans forward to sign.*]

ALEEL [*rushing forward and snatching the
parchment from her*]. Leave all things to
the builder of the heavens.

CATHLEEN. I have no thoughts: I hear a
cry — a cry.

ALEEL [*casting the parchment on the ground*].

I had a vision under a green hedge,
A hedge of hips and haws — men yet shall
hear

The archangels rolling Satan's empty
skull

Over the mountain-tops.

FIRST MERCHANT. Take him away.

[TEIG and SHEMUS drag him roughly away
so that he falls upon the floor among the
peasants. CATHLEEN picks up the parch-
ment and signs, and then turns towards the
peasants.]

CATHLEEN. Take up the money; and now
come with me.

When we are far from this polluted place
I will give everybody money enough.

*[She goes out, the peasants crowding round
her and kissing her dress. ALEEL and the
TWO MERCHANTS are left alone.]*

SECOND MERCHANT. Now are our days of
heavy labour done.

FIRST MERCHANT. We have a precious jewel
for Satan's crown.

SECOND MERCHANT. We must away, and
wait until she dies,

Sitting above her tower as two gray owls,
Watching as many years as may be, guarding
Our precious jewel; waiting to seize her soul.

FIRST MERCHANT. We need but hover over
her head in the air,
For she has only minutes: when she came

I saw the dimness of the tomb in her,
And marked her walking as with leaden shoes
And looking on the ground as though the
worms

Were calling her, and when she wrote her
name

Her heart began to break. Hush! hush! I
hear

The brazen door of Hell moves on its hinges,
And the eternal revelry float hither

To hearten us.

SECOND MERCHANT. Leap, feathered, on the
air

And meet them with her soul caught in your
claws.

[*They rush out. ALEEL crawls into the
middle of the room. The twilight has fallen*

*and gradually darkens as the scene goes on.
There is a distant muttering of thunder
and a sound of rising storm.]*

ALEEL. The brazen door stands wide, and
Balor comes

Borne in his heavy car, and demons have lifted
The age-weary eyelids from the eyes that of
old

Turned gods to stone; Barach the traitor
comes;

And the lascivious race, Cailitin,

That cast a Druid weakness and decay

Over Sualtam's and old Dectora's child;

And that great king Hell first took hold upon

When he killed Naisi and broke Deirdre's
heart,

And all their heads are twisted to one side,

For when they lived they warred on beauty
and peace

With obstinate, crafty, sidelong bitterness.

[OONA enters, but remains standing by the
door. ALEEL half rises, leaning upon one
arm and one knee.]

ALEEL. Crouch down, old heron, out of the
blind storm.

OONA. Where is the Countess Cathleen?
All this day

She has been pale and weakly: when her
hand

Touched mine over the spindle her hand
trembled,

And now I do not know where she has gone.

ALEEL. Cathleen has chosen other friends
than us,

And they are rising through the hollow world.

[He points downwards.]

First, Orchil, her pale beautiful head alive,
Her body shadowy as vapour drifting
Under the dawn, for she who awoke desire
Has but a heart of blood when others die;
About her is a vapoury multitude
Of women alluring devils with soft laughter;
Behind her a host heat of the blood made
sin,

But all the little pink-white nails have grown
To be great talons.

*[He seizes OONA and drags her into the middle
of the room and points downwards with ve-
hement gestures. The wind roars.]*

They begin a song
And there is still some music on their tongues.

OONA [*casting herself face downwards on the floor*]. O maker of all, protect her from the demons,

And if a soul must needs be lost, take mine.

[ALEEL *kneels beside her, but does not seem to hear her words; he is gazing down as if through the earth. The peasants return. They carry the COUNTESS CATHLEEN and lay her upon the ground before OONA and ALEEL. She lies there as if dead.*]

OONA. O that so many pitchers of rough clay

Should prosper and the porcelain break in two.

[*She kisses the hands of the COUNTESS CATHLEEN.*]

A PEASANT. We were under the tree where the path turns

When she grew pale as death and fainted away,
And while we bore her hither, cloudy gusts
Blackened the world and shook us on our feet :
Draw the great bolt, for no man has beheld
So black, bitter, blinding, and sudden a storm.

[One who is near the door draws the bolt.]

OONA. Hush, hush, she has awakened
from her swoon.

CATHLEEN. O hold me, and hold me tightly,
for the storm
Is dragging me away.

*[OONA takes her in her arms. A woman
begins to wail.]*

A PEASANT. Hush.

ANOTHER PEASANT. Hush.

A PEASANT WOMAN. Hush.

ANOTHER PEASANT WOMAN. Hush.

CATHLEEN [*half rising*]. Lay all the bags
of money at my feet.

[*They lay the bags at her feet.*]

And send and bring old Neal when I am dead,
And bid him hear each man and judge and
give:

He doctors you with herbs, and can best say
Who has the less and who the greater need.

A PEASANT WOMAN [*at the back of the
crowd*]. And will he give enough out of
the bags

To keep my children till the dearth go by?

ANOTHER PEASANT WOMAN. O Queen of
Heaven and all you blessed saints,
Let us and ours be lost, so she be shriven.

CATHLEEN. Bend down your faces, Oona
and Aleel:

I gaze upon them as the swallow gazes
 Upon the nest under the eave, before
 He wander the loud waters: do not weep
 Too great a while, for there is many a candle
 On the high altar though one fall. Aleel,
 Who sang about the people of the raths,
 That know not the hard burden of the world,
 Having but breath in their kind bodies, fare-
 well !

And farewell, Oona, who spun flax with me
 Soft as their sleep when every dance is done :
 The storm is in my hair and I must go.

[*She dies.*]

OONA. Bring me the looking-glass.

[*A woman brings it to her out of the inner
 room. OONA holds the glass over the lips
 of the COUNTESS CATHLEEN. All is silent*

for a moment. And then she speaks in a half scream.]

O, she is dead.

A PEASANT WOMAN. She was the great white lily of the world.

ANOTHER PEASANT WOMAN. She was more beautiful than the pale stars.

AN OLD PEASANT WOMAN. The little plant I loved is broken in two.

[*ALEEL takes the looking-glass from OONA and flings it upon the floor so that it is broken in many pieces.*]

ALEEL. I shatter you in fragments, for the face

That brimmed you up with beauty is no more:
And die, dull heart, for she whose mournful words

Made you a living spirit has passed away
 And left you but a ball of passionate dust;
 And you, proud earth and plummy sea, fade out,
 For you may hear no more her faltering feet
 But are left lonely amid the clamorous war
 Of angels upon devils.

*[He stands up; almost every one is kneeling,
 but it has grown so dark that only con-
 fused forms can be seen.]*

And I who weep
 Call curses on you, Time and Fate and Change,
 And have no excellent hope but the great
 hour
 When you shall plunge headlong through bot-
 tomless space.

*[A flash of lightning followed immediately by
 thunder.]*

A PEASANT WOMAN. Pull him upon his
knees before his curses
Have plucked thunder and lightning on our
heads.

ALEEL. Angels and devils clash in the
middle air,
And brazen swords clang upon brazen helms :
[*A flash of lightning followed immediately by
thunder.*]

Yonder a bright spear, cast out of a sling,
Has torn through Balor's eye, and the dark
clans

Fly screaming as they fled Moytura of old.

[*Everything is lost in darkness.*]

AN OLD MAN. The Almighty wrath at our
great weakness and sin
Has blotted out the world and we must die.

[The darkness is broken by a visionary light.

The peasants seem to be kneeling upon the rocky slope of a mountain, and vapour full of storm and ever changing light is sweeping above them and behind them. Half in the light, half in the shadow, stand armed angels. Their armour is old and worn, and their drawn swords dim and dinted. They stand as if upon the air in formation of battle and look downward with stern faces. The peasants cast themselves on the ground.]

ALEEL. Look no more on the half-closed
gates of Hell,

But speak to me, whose mind is smitten of
God,

That it may be no more with mortal things;

And tell of her who lies here.

[He seizes one of the angels.]

Till you speak

You shall not drift into eternity.

THE ANGEL. The light beats down: the
gates of pearl are wide,

And she is passing to the floor of peace,

And Mary of the seven times wounded heart
Has kissed her lips, and the long blessed
hair

Has fallen on her face; the Light of Lights
Looks always on the motive, not the deed,
The Shadow of Shadows on the deed alone.

[ALEEL releases the angel and kneels.]

OONA. Tell them who walk upon the floor
of peace

That I would die and go to her I love;

The years like great black oxen tread the
world,

And God the herdsman goads them on behind,
And I am broken by their passing feet.

*[A sound of far-off horns seems to come from
the heart of the light. The vision melts
away, and the forms of the kneeling peasants
appear faintly in the darkness.]*

THE LAND OF HEART'S
DESIRE

O Rose, thou art sick.—WILLIAM BLACK.

TO FLORENCE FARR

MAURTEEN BRUIN
SHAWN BRUIN
FATHER HART
BRIDGET BRUIN
MAIRE BRUIN
A FAERY CHILD

The scene is laid in the Barony of Kilmacowen, in the County of Sligo, and the characters are supposed to speak in Gaelic. They wear the costume of a century ago.

The kitchen of MAURTEEN BRUIN'S house. An open grate with a turf fire is at the left side of the room, with a table in front of it. There is a door leading to the open air at the back, and another door a little to its left, leading into an inner room. There is a window, a settle, and a large dresser on the right side of the room, and a great bowl of primroses on the sill of the window. MAURTEEN BRUIN, FATHER HART, and BRIDGET BRUIN are sitting at the table. SHAWN BRUIN is setting the table for supper. MAIRE BRUIN sits on the settle reading a yellow manuscript.

BRIDGET BRUIN. Because I bade her go
and feed the calves,

She took that old book down out of the thatch
And has been doubled over it all day.

We would be deafened by her groans and
moans

Had she to work as some do, Father Hart,
Get up at dawn like me, and mend and scour ;
Or ride abroad in the boisterous night like
you,

The pyx and blessed bread under your arm.

SHAWN BRUIN. You are too cross.

BRIDGET BRUIN. The young side with the
young.

MAURTEEN BRUIN. She quarrels with my
wife a bit at times,

And is too deep just now in the old book !

But do not blame her greatly; she will grow
As quiet as a puff-ball in a tree
When but the moons of marriage dawn and
die

For half a score of times.

FATHER HART. Their hearts are wild
As be the hearts of birds, till children come.

BRIDGET BRUIN. She would not mind the
griddle, milk the cow,
Or even lay the knives and spread the cloth.

FATHER HART. I never saw her read a book
before;
What may it be?

MAURTEEN BRUIN. I do not rightly know;
It has been in the thatch for fifty years.
My father told me my grandfather wrote it,
Killed a red heifer and bound it with the hide.

But draw your chair this way — supper is
spread;

And little good he got out of the book,
Because it filled his house with roaming bards,
And roaming ballad-makers and the like,
And wasted all his goods. — Here is the wine:
The griddle bread's beside you, Father Hart.
Colleen, what have you got there in the book
That you must leave the bread to cool? Had

I,

Or had my father, read or written books
There were no stocking full of silver and gold
To come, when I am dead, to Shawn and you.

FATHER HART. You should not fill your
head with foolish dreams.

What are you reading?

MAIRE BRUIN. How a Princess Edane,

A daughter of a King of Ireland, heard
A voice singing on a May Eve like this,
And followed, half awake and half asleep,
Until she came into the land of faery,
Where nobody gets old and godly and grave,
Where nobody gets old and crafty and wise,
Where nobody gets old and bitter of tongue;
And she is still there, busied with a dance,
Deep in the dewy shadow of a wood,
Or where stars walk upon a mountain-top.

MAURTEEN BRUIN. Persuade the colleen
to put by the book:

My grandfather would mutter just such things,
And he was no judge of a dog or horse,
And any idle boy could blarney him:
Just speak your mind.

FATHER HART. Put it away, my colleen.

God spreads the heavens above us like great
wings,

And gives a little round of deeds and days,

And then come the wrecked angels and set
snares,

And bait them with light hopes and heavy
dreams,

Until the heart is puffed with pride and goes,
Half shuddering and half joyous, from God's
peace:

And it was some wrecked angel, blind from
tears,

Who flattered Edane's heart with merry words.

My colleen, I have seen some other girls

Restless and ill at ease, but years went by

And they grew like their neighbours and were
glad

In minding children, working at the churn,
And gossiping of weddings and of wakes;
For life moves out of a red flare of dreams
Into a common light of common hours,
Until old age bring the red flare again.

SHAWN BRUIN. Yet do not blame her
greatly, Father Hart,
For she is dull while I am in the fields,
And mother's tongue were harder still to bear,
But for her fancies: this is May Eve too,
When the good people post about the world,
And surely one may think of them to-night.
Maire, have you the primroses to fling
Before the door to make a golden path
For them to bring good luck into the house?
Remember, they may steal new-married brides
After the fall of twilight on May Eve.

[MAIRE BRUIN *goes over to the window and takes flowers from the bowl and strews them outside the door.*]

FATHER HART. You do well, daughter, because God permits

Great power to the good people on May
Eve.

SHAWN BRUIN. They can work all their will
with primroses;

Change them to golden money, or little flames
To burn up those who do them any wrong.

MAIRE BRUIN [*in a dreamy voice*]. I had no
sooner flung them by the door
Than the wind cried and hurried them away;
And then a child came running in the wind
And caught them in her hands and fondled
them :

Her dress was green : her hair was of red gold ;
Her face was pale as water before dawn.

FATHER HART. Whose child can this be ?

MAURTEEN BRUIN. No one's child at all.
She often dreams that some one has gone by
When there was nothing but a puff of wind.

MAIRE BRUIN. They will not bring good
luck into the house,
For they have blown the primroses away ;
Yet I am glad that I was courteous to them,
For are not they, likewise, children of God ?

FATHER HART. Colleen, they are the chil-
dren of the fiend,
And they have power until the end of Time,
When God shall fight with them a great
pitched battle
And hack them into pieces.

MAIRE BRUIN. He will smile,
 Father, perhaps, and open His great door,
 And call the pretty and kind into His house.

FATHER HART. Did but the lawless angels
 see that door,
 They would fall, slain by everlasting peace;
 And when such angels knock upon our doors
 Who goes with them must drive through the
 same storm.

[*A knock at the door. MAIRE BRUIN opens
 it and then goes to the dresser and fills a
 porringer with milk and hands it through
 the door and takes it back empty and closes
 the door.*]

MAIRE BRUIN. A little queer old woman
 cloaked in green,
 Who came to beg a porringer of milk.

BRIDGET BRUIN. The good people go asking milk and fire

Upon May Eve — Woe on the house that gives,
For they have power upon it for a year.

I knew you would bring evil on the house.

MAURTEEN BRUIN. Who was she?

MAIRE BRUIN. Both the tongue and face
were strange.

MAURTEEN BRUIN. Some strangers came
last week to Clover Hill;

She must be one of them.

BRIDGET BRUIN. I am afraid.

MAURTEEN BRUIN. The priest will keep all
harm out of the house.

FATHER HART. The cross will keep all
harm out of the house

While it hangs there.

148 *THE LAND OF HEART'S DESIRE*

MAURTEEN BRUIN. Come, sit beside me,
colleen,

And put away your dreams of discontent,
For I would have you light up my last days
Like a bright torch of pine, and when I die
I will make you the wealthiest hereabout:
For hid away where nobody can find
I have a stocking full of silver and gold.

BRIDGET BRUIN. You are the fool of every
pretty face,
And I must pinch and pare that my son's wife
May have all kinds of ribbons for her head.

MAURTEEN BRUIN. Do not be cross; she
is a right good girl!
The butter is by your elbow, Father Hart.
My colleen, have not Fate and Time and
Change

Done well for me and for old Bridget there?

We have a hundred acres of good land,

And sit beside each other at the fire,

The wise priest of our parish to our right,

And you and our dear son to left of us.

To sit beside the board and drink good wine

And watch the turf smoke coiling from the
fire

And feel content and wisdom in your heart,

This is the best of life; when we are young

We long to tread a way none trod before,

But find the excellent old way through love

And through the care of children to the hour

For bidding Fate and Time and Change good-
bye.

[*A knock at the door. MAIRE BRUIN opens
it and then takes a sod of turf out of the*

*hearth in the tongs and passes it through
the door and closes the door and remains
standing by it.]*

MAIRE BRUIN. A little queer old man in a
green coat,
Who asked a burning sod to light his pipe.

BRIDGET BRUIN. You have now given milk
and fire, and brought,
For all you know, evil upon the house.
Before you married you were idle and fine,
And went about with ribbons on your head;
And now you are a good-for-nothing wife.

SHAWN BRUIN. Be quiet, mother!

MAURTEEN BRUIN. You are much too
cross!

MAIRE BRUIN. What do I care if I have
given this house,

Where I must hear all day a bitter tongue,
Into the power of faeries !

BRIDGET BRUIN. You know well
How calling the good people by that name
Or talking of them over much at all
May bring all kinds of evil on the house.

MAIRE BRUIN. Come, faeries, take me out
of this dull house !

Let me have all the freedom I have lost ;
Work when I will and idle when I will !
Faeries, come take me out of this dull
world,

For I would ride with you upon the wind,
Run on the top of the dishevelled tide,
And dance upon the mountains like a flame !

FATHER HART. You cannot know the mean-
ing of your words.

MAIRE BRUIN. Father, I am right weary of
four tongues:

A tongue that is too crafty and too wise,
A tongue that is too godly and too grave,
A tongue that is more bitter than the tide,
And a kind tongue too full of drowsy love,
Of drowsy love and my captivity.

[SHAWN BRUIN *comes over to her and leads
her to the settle.*]

SHAWN BRUIN. Do not blame me: I often
lie awake

Thinking that all things trouble your bright
head —

How beautiful it is — such broad pale brows
Under a cloudy blossoming of hair!
Sit down beside me here — these are too old,
And have forgotten they were ever young.

MAIRE BRUIN. O, you are the great door-
post of this house,

And I, the red nasturtium, climbing up.

*[She takes SHAWN'S hand, but looks shyly at
the priest and lets it go.]*

FATHER HART. Good daughter, take his
hand — by love alone

God binds us to Himself and to the hearth
And shuts us from the waste beyond His
peace,

From maddening freedom and bewildering
light.

SHAWN BRUIN. Would that the world were
mine to give it you

With every quiet hearth and barren waste,
The maddening freedom of its woods and tides,
And the bewildering light upon its hills.

MAIRE BRUIN. Then I would take and
break it in my hands

To see you smile watching it crumble away.

SHAWN BRUIN. Then I would mould a
world of fire and dew

With no one bitter, grave, or over wise,
And nothing marred or old to do you wrong.
And crowd the enraptured quiet of the sky
With candles burning to your lonely face.

MAIRE BRUIN. Your looks are all the can-
dles that I need.

SHAWN BRUIN. Once a fly dancing in a
beam of the sun,
Or the light wind blowing out of the dawn,
Could fill your heart with dreams none other
knew,
But now the indissoluble sacrament

Has mixed your heart that was most proud
and cold

With my warm heart for ever; and sun and
moon

Must fade and heaven be rolled up like a
scroll;

But your white spirit still walk by my spirit.

[A VOICE *sings in the distance.*]

MAIRE BRUIN. Did you hear something
call? O, guard me close,

Because I have said wicked things to-night;
And seen a pale-faced child with red-gold
hair,

And longed to dance upon the winds with her.

A VOICE [*close to the door*]. *The wind blows
out of the gates of the day,*

The wind blows over the lonely of heart

*And the lonely of heart is withered away,
 While the faeries dance in a place apart,
 Shaking their milk-white feet in a ring,
 Tossing their milk-white arms in the air ;
 For they hear the wind laugh, and murmur and
 sing*

*Of a land where even the old are fair,
 And even the wise are merry of tongue ;
 But I heard a reed of Coolaney say,
 “ When the wind has laughed and murmured and
 sung,*

The lonely of heart is withered away ! ”

MAURTEEN BRUIN. I am right happy, and
 would make all else
 Be happy too. I hear a child outside,
 And will go bring her in out of the cold.

[*He opens the door. A CHILD dressed in pale*

green and with red-gold hair comes into the house.]

THE CHILD. I tire of winds and waters and
pale lights!

MAURTEEN BRUIN. You are most welcome.

It is cold out there;
Who'd think to face such cold on a May
Eve?

THE CHILD. And when I tire of this warm
little house
There is one here who must away, away,
To where the woods, the stars, and the white
streams

Are holding a continual festival.

MAURTEEN BRUIN. O listen to her dreamy
and strange talk.
Come to the fire.

THE CHILD. I will sit upon your knee,
For I have run from where the winds are born,
And long to rest my feet a little while.

[She sits upon his knee.]

BRIDGET BRUIN. How pretty you are !

MAURTEEN BRUIN. Your hair is wet with
dew !

BRIDGET BRUIN. I will warm your chilly
feet.

[She takes THE CHILD'S feet in her hands.]

MAURTEEN BRUIN. You must have come
A long, long way, for I have never seen
Your pretty face, and must be tired and hun-
gry ;

Here is some bread and wine.

THE CHILD. The wine is bitter.
Old mother, have you no sweet food for me ?

BRIDGET BRUIN. I have some honey !

[She goes into the next room.]

MAURTEEN BRUIN. You are a dear child ;
The mother was quite cross before you came.

*[BRIDGET returns with the honey, and goes
to the dresser and fills a porringer with
milk.]*

BRIDGET BRUIN. She is the child of gentle
people ; look
At her white hands and at her pretty dress.
I have brought you some new milk, but wait
awhile,
And I will put it by the fire to warm,
For things well fitted for poor folk like us
Would never please a high-born child like you.

THE CHILD. Old mother, my old mother,
the green dawn

Brightens above while you blow up the fire;
And evening finds you spreading the white
cloth.

The young may lie in bed and dream and hope,
But you work on because your heart is old.

BRIDGET BRUIN. The young are idle.

THE CHILD. Old father, you are wise
And all the years have gathered in your heart
To whisper of the wonders that are gone.

The young must sigh through many a dream
and hope,

But you are wise because your heart is old.

MAURTEEN BRUIN. O, who would think to
find so young a child

Loving old age and wisdom?

[BRIDGET *gives her more bread and honey.*]

THE CHILD, No more, mother.

MAURTEEN BRUIN. What a small bite!

The milk is ready now;

What a small sip!

THE CHILD. Put on my shoes, old mother,
For I would like to dance now I have eaten.

The reeds are dancing by Coolaney lake,

And I would like to dance until the reeds

And the white waves have danced themselves
to sleep.

[BRIDGET *having put on her shoes, she gets
off the old man's knees and is about to
dance, but suddenly sees the crucifix and
shrieks and covers her eyes.*]

What is that ugly thing on the black cross?

FATHER HART. You cannot know how
naughty your words are!

That is our Blessed Lord!

THE CHILD. Hide it away!

BRIDGET BRUIN. I have begun to be afraid,
again!

THE CHILD. Hide it away!

MAURTEEN BRUIN. That would be wicked-
ness!

BRIDGET BRUIN. That would be sacrilege!

THE CHILD. The tortured thing!
Hide it away!

MAURTEEN BRUIN. Her parents are to
blame.

FATHER HART. That is the image of the
Son of God.

[THE CHILD *puts her arm round his neck and
kisses him.*]

THE CHILD. Hide it away! Hide it away!

MAURTEEN BRUIN. No! no!

FATHER HART. Because you are so young
and little a child

I will go take it down.

THE CHILD. Hide it away,
And cover it out of sight and out of mind.

[FATHER HART *takes it down and carries it
towards the inner room.*]

FATHER HART. Since you have come into
this barony

I will instruct you in our blessed faith :
Being a clever child you will soon learn.

[*To the others.*]

We must be tender with all budding things.
Our Maker let no thought of Calvary
Trouble the morning stars in their first
song.

[*Puts the crucifix in the inner room.*]

THE CHILD. Here is level ground for dancing. I will dance.

The wind is blowing on the waving reeds,
The wind is blowing on the heart of man.

[She dances, swaying about like the reeds.]

MAIRE *[to SHAWN BRUIN]*. Just now when
she came near I thought I heard
Other small steps beating upon the floor,
And a faint music blowing in the wind,
Invisible pipes giving her feet the time.

SHAWN BRUIN. I heard no step but hers.

MAIRE BRUIN. Look to the bolt!
Because the unholy powers are abroad.

MAURTEEN BRUIN *[to THE CHILD]*. Come
over here, and if you promise me
Not to talk wickedly of holy things
I will give you something.

THE CHILD. Bring it me, old father!

[MAURTEEN BRUIN *goes into the next room.*]

FATHER HART. I will have queen cakes
when you come to me!

[MAURTEEN BRUIN *returns and lays a piece
of money on the table. THE CHILD makes
a gesture of refusal.*]

MAURTEEN BRUIN. It will buy lots of
toys; see how it glitters!

THE CHILD. Come, tell me, do you love
me?

MAURTEEN BRUIN. I love you!

THE CHILD. Ah! but you love this fire-
side!

FATHER HART. I love you.

THE CHILD. But you love Him above.

BRIDGET BRUIN. She is blaspheming.

THE CHILD [*to MAIRE*]. And do you love
me?

MAIRE BRUIN. I — I do not know.

THE CHILD. You love that great tall fellow over there:

Yet I could make you ride upon the winds,
Run on the top of the dishevelled tide,
And dance upon the mountains like a flame!

MAIRE BRUIN. Queen of the Angels and
kind Saints, defend us!

Some dreadful fate has fallen: a while ago
The wind cried out and took the primroses,
And she ran by me laughing in the wind,
And I gave milk and fire, and she came in
And made you hide the blessed crucifix.

FATHER HART. You fear because of her
wild, pretty prattle;

She knows no better. [To THE CHILD.]

Child, how old are you?

THE CHILD. When winter sleep is abroad
my hair grows thin,
My feet unsteady. When the leaves awaken
My mother carries me in her golden arms.
I'll soon put on my womanhood and marry
The spirits of wood and water, but who can
tell

When I was born for the first time? I think
I am much older than the eagle cock
That blinks and blinks on Ballygawley Hill,
And he is the oldest thing under the moon.

FATHER HART. She is of the faery people.

THE CHILD. I am Brig's daughter.
I sent my messengers for milk and fire,
And then I heard one call to me and came.

[They all except MAIRE BRUIN gather about the priest for protection. MAIRE BRUIN stays on the settle in a stupor of terror. THE CHILD takes primroses from the great bowl and begins to strew them between herself and the priest and about MAIRE BRUIN. During the following dialogue SHAWN BRUIN goes more than once to the brink of the primroses, but shrinks back to the others timidly.]

FATHER HART. I will confront this mighty spirit alone.

[They cling to him and hold him back.]

THE CHILD *[while she strews the primroses]*.

No one whose heart is heavy with human tears

Can cross these little cressets of the wood.

FATHER HART. Be no afraid, the Father is
with us,
And all the nine angelic hierarchies,
The Holy Martyrs and the Innocents,
The adoring Magi in their coats of mail,
And He who died and rose on the third day,
And Mary with her seven times wounded
heart.

[THE CHILD *ceases strewing the primroses, and
kneels upon the settle beside MAIRE and
puts her arms about her neck.*]

Cry, daughter, to the Angels and the Saints.

THE CHILD. You shall go with me, newly
married bride,
And gaze upon a merrier multitude;
White-armed Nuala and Aengus of the birds,
And Feacra of the hurtling foam, and him

Who is the ruler of the western host,
Finvarra, and their Land of Heart's Desire,
Where beauty has no ebb, decay no flood,
But joy is wisdom, Time an endless song.
I kiss you and the world begins to fade.

FATHER HART. Daughter, I call you unto
home and love!

THE CHILD. Stay, and come with me, newly
married bride,
For, if you hear him, you grow like the rest :
Bear children, cook, be mindful of the churn,
And wrangle over butter, fowl, and eggs,
And sit at last there, old and bitter of tongue,
Watching the white stars war upon your
hopes.

FATHER HART. Daughter, I point you out
the way to heaven.

THE CHILD. But I can lead you, newly
married bride,

Where nobody gets old and crafty and wise,
Where nobody gets old and godly and grave,
Where nobody gets old and bitter of tongue,
And where kind tongues bring no captivity,
For we are only true to the far lights
We follow singing, over valley and hill.

FATHER HART. By the dear name of the one
crucified,

I bid you, Maire Bruin, come to me.

THE CHILD. I keep you in the name of your
own heart !

*[She leaves the settle, and stooping takes up a
mass of primroses and kisses them.]*

We have great power to-night, dear golden
folk,

For he took down and hid the crucifix.
 And my invisible brethren fill the house;
 I hear their footsteps going up and down.
 O, they shall soon rule all the hearts of men
 And own all lands; last night they merrily
 danced

About his chapel belfry! [*To MAIRE.*] Come
 away,

I hear my brethren bidding us away!

FATHER HART. I will go fetch the crucifix
 again.

[*They hang about him in terror and prevent
 him from moving.*]

BRIDGET BRUIN. The enchanted flowers
 will kill us if you go.

MAURTEEN BRUIN. They turn the flowers
 to little twisted flames.

SHAWN BRUIN. The little twisted flames
burn up the heart.

THE CHILD. I hear them crying, "Newly
married bride,
Come to the woods and waters and pale
lights."

MAIRE BRUIN. I will go with you.

FATHER HART. She is lost, alas!

THE CHILD [*standing by the door*]. Then,
follow: but the heavy body of clay
And clinging mortal hope must fall from
you
For we who ride the winds, run on the
waves,
And dance upon the mountains, are more
light
Than dewdrops on the banners of the dawn.

MAIRE BRUIN. Then take my soul.

[SHAWN BRUIN *goes over to her.*]

SHAWN BRUIN. Beloved, do not leave me!
Remember when I met you by the well
And took your hand in mine and spoke of
love.

MAIRE BRUIN. Dear face! Dear voice!

THE CHILD. Come, newly married bride!

MAIRE BRUIN. I always loved her world —
and yet — and yet —

[*Sinks into his arms.*]

THE CHILD [*from the door*]. White bird,
white bird, come with me, little bird.

MAIRE BRUIN. She calls my soul!

THE CHILD. Come with me, little bird!

MAIRE BRUIN. I can hear songs and dancing!

SHAWN BRUIN. Stay with me!

MAIRE BRUIN. I think that I would stay —
and yet — and yet —

THE CHILD. Come, little bird with crest of
gold!

MAIRE BRUIN [*very softly*]. And yet —

THE CHILD. Come, little bird with silver
feet!

[MAIRE *dies*, and THE CHILD *goes*.]

SHAWN BRUIN. She is dead!

BRIDGET BRUIN. Come from that image
there: she is far away.

You have thrown your arms about a drift of
leaves

Or bole of an ash-tree changed into her image.

FATHER HART. Thus do the spirits of evil
snatch their prey

Almost out of the very hand of God;
And day by day their power is more and
more,
And men and women leave old paths, for
pride
Comes knocking with thin knuckles on the
heart.

A VOICE [*singing outside*]. *The wind blows
out of the gates of the day,
The wind blows over the lonely of heart,
And the lonely of heart is withered away
While the faeries dance in a place apart,
Shaking their milk-white feet in a ring,
Tossing their milk-white arms in the air;
For they hear the wind laugh and murmur and
sing
Of a land where even the old are fair,*

And even the wise are merry of tongue ;

But I heard a reed of Coolaney say,

*“ When the wind has laughed and murmured and
sung,*

The lonely of heart is withered away.”

*[The song is taken up by many voices, who
sing loudly, as if in triumph. Some of the
voices seem to come from within the house.]*

THE SHADOWY WATERS

TO LADY GREGORY

*I walked among the seven woods of Coole,
Shan-walla, where a willow-bordered pond
Gathers the wild duck from the winter dawn;
Shady Kyle-dortha; sunnier Kyle-na-gno,
Where many hundred squirrels are as happy
As though they had been hidden by green boughs,
Where old age cannot find them; Pairc-na-lea,
Where hazel and ash and privet blind the paths;
Dim Pairc-na-carraig, where the wild bees fling
Their sudden fragrances on the green air;
Dim Pairc-na-tarav, where enchanted eyes
Have seen immortal, mild, proud shadows walk;
Dim Inchy wood, that hides badger and fox
And martin-cat, and borders that old wood
Wise Biddy Early called the wicked wood:*

Seven odours, seven murmurs, seven woods.

I had not eyes like those enchanted eyes,

Yet dreamed that beings happier than men

Moved round me in the shadows, and at night

My dreams were cloven by voices and by fires ;

And the images I have woven in this story

Of Forgael and Dectora and the empty waters

Moved round me in the voices and the fires,

And more I may not write of, for they that cleave

The waters of sleep can make a chattering tongue

Heavy like stone, their wisdom being half silence.

*How shall I name you, immortal, mild, proud
shadows ?*

*I only know that all we know comes from
you,*

And that you come from Eden on flying feet.

*Is Eden far away, or do you hide
From human thought, as hares and mice and
coney*

*That run before the reaping-hook and lie
In the last ridge of the barley? Do our woods
And winds and ponds cover more quiet woods,
More shining winds, more star-glimmering
ponds?*

*Is Eden out of time and out of space?
And do you gather about us when pale light
Shining on water and fallen among leaves,
And winds blowing from flowers, and whirr of
feathers*

And the green quiet, have uplifted the heart?

*I have made this poem for you, that men may
read it*

*Before they read of Forgael and Dectora,
As men in the old times, before the harps began,
Poured out wine for the high invisible ones.*

SEPTEMBER, 1900.

THE HARP OF AENGUS

*Edain came out of Midher's hill, and lay
Beside young Aengus in his tower of glass,
Where time is drowned in odour-laden winds
And druid moons, and murmuring of boughs,
And sleepy boughs, and boughs where apples
made*

*Of opal and ruby and pale chrysolite
Awake unsleeping fires; and wove seven strings,
Sweet with all music, out of his long hair,
Because her hands had been made wild by love;
When Midher's wife had changed her to a fly,
He made a harp with druid apple wood
That she among her winds might know he wept;
And from that hour he has watched over none
But faithful lovers.*

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

FORGAEL

AIBRIC

SAILORS

DECTORA

THE SHADOWY WATERS

SCENE. *The deck of an ancient ship. At the right of the stage is the mast, with a large square sail hiding a great deal of the sky and sea on that side. The tiller is at the left of the stage; it is a long oar coming through an opening in the bulwark. The deck rises in a series of steps behind the tiller, and the stern of the ship curves overhead. All the wood-work is of dark green; and the sail is dark green, with a blue pattern upon it, having a little copper colour here and there. The sky and sea are dark blue. All the persons of the play are dressed in various tints of green and blue, the men with helmets and swords of*

copper, the woman with copper ornaments upon her dress. When the play opens there are four persons upon the deck. AIBRIC stands by the tiller. FORGAEL sleeps upon the raised portion of the deck towards the front of the stage. Two SAILORS are standing near to the mast, on which a harp is hanging.

FIRST SAILOR. Has he not led us into these
waste seas

For long enough?

SECOND SAILOR. Aye, long and long enough.

FIRST SAILOR. We have not come upon a
shore or ship

These dozen weeks.

SECOND SAILOR. And I had thought to
make

A good round sum upon this cruise, and
turn —

For I am getting on in life — to something
That has less ups and downs than robbery.

FIRST SAILOR. I am so lecherous with
abstinence

I'd give the profit of nine voyages
For that red Moll that had but the one eye.

SECOND SAILOR. And all the ale ran out at
the new moon;

And now that time puts water in my blood,
The ale cup is my father and my mother.

FIRST SAILOR. It would be better to turn
home again,

Whether he will or no; and better still
To make an end while he is sleeping there.
If we were of one mind I'd do it.

While I was looking they rose hurriedly,
And after circling with strange cries awhile
Flew westward; and many a time since then
I've heard a rustling overhead in the wind.

FIRST SAILOR. I saw them on that night as
well as you.

But when I had eaten and drunk a bellyful
My courage came again.

SECOND SAILOR. But that's not all.
The other night, while he was playing it,
A beautiful young man and girl came up
In a white, breaking wave; they had the
look

Of those that are alive for ever and ever.

FIRST SAILOR. I saw them, too, one night.

Forgael was playing,
And they were listening there beyond the sail.

He could not see them, but I held out my
hands

To grasp the woman.

SECOND SAILOR. You have dared to touch
her?

FIRST SAILOR. O, she was but a shadow,
and slipped from me.

SECOND SAILOR. But were you not afraid?

FIRST SAILOR. Why should I fear?

SECOND SAILOR. 'Twas Aengus and Edain,
the wandering lovers,

To whom all lovers pray.

FIRST SAILOR. But what of that?

A shadow does not carry sword or spear.

SECOND SAILOR. My mother told me that
there is not one

Of the ever-living half so dangerous

As that wild Aengus. Long before her day
He carried Edain off from a king's house,
And hid her among fruits of jewel-stone
And in a tower of glass, and from that day
Has hated every man that's not in love,
And has been dangerous to him.

FIRST SAILOR. I have heard
He does not hate seafarers as he hates
Peaceable men that shut the wind away,
And keep to the one weary marriage bed.

SECOND SAILOR. I think that he has Forgael
in his net,
And drags him through the sea.

FIRST SAILOR. Well, net or none
I'd kill him while we have the chance to do it.

SECOND SAILOR. It's certain I'd sleep easier
o' nights

If he were dead ; but who will be our captain,
Judge of the stars, and find a course for us ?

FIRST SAILOR. I've thought of that. We
must have Aibric with us,
For he can judge the stars as well as Forgael.

[*Going towards AIBRIC.*]

Become our captain, Aibric. I am resolved
To make an end of Forgael while he sleeps.
There's not a man but will be glad of it
When it is over, nor one to grumble at us.
You'll have the captain's share of everything.

AIBRIC. Silence ! for you have taken For-
gael's pay.

FIRST SAILOR. We joined him for his pay,
but have had none
This long while now ; we had not turned
against him

If he had brought us among peopled seas,
For that was in the bargain when we struck
it.

What good is there in this hard way of living,
Unless we drain more flagons in a year
And kiss more lips than lasting peaceable men
In their long lives? If you'll be of our troop
You'll be as good a leader.

AIBRIC.

Be of your troop!

No, nor with a hundred men like you
When Forgael's in the other scale. I'd say it
Even if Forgael had not been my master
From earliest childhood, but that being so,
If you will draw that sword out of its scabbard
I'll give my answer.

FIRST SAILOR.

You have awaked him.

[To SECOND SAILOR.]

We'd better go, for we have lost this chance.

[*They go out.*]

FORGAEL. Have the birds passed us? I
could hear your voice.

But there were others.

AIBRIC. I have seen nothing pass.

FORGAEL. You're certain of it? I never
wake from sleep

But that I am afraid they may have passed,

For they're my only pilots. If I lost them

Straying too far into the north or south,

I'd never come upon the happiness

That has been promised me. I have not seen
them

These many days; and yet there must be
many

Dying at every moment in the world,

And flying towards their peace.

AIBRIC. Put by these thoughts,
And listen to me for awhile. The sailors
Are plotting for your death.

FORGAEL. Have I not given
More riches than they ever hoped to find?
And now they will not follow, while I seek
The only riches that have hit my fancy.

AIBRIC. What riches can you find in this
waste sea
Where no ship sails, where nothing that's
alive
Has ever come but those man-headed birds,
Knowing it for the world's end?

FORGAEL. Where the world ends
The mind is made unchanging, for it finds
Miracle, ecstasy, the impossible hope,

The flagstone under all, the fire of fires,
The roots of the world.

AIBRIC. Who knows that shadows
May not have driven you mad for their own
sport?

FORGAEL. Do you, too, doubt me? Have
you joined their plot?

AIBRIC. No, no, do not say that. You
know right well
That I will never lift a hand against you.

FORGAEL. Why should you be more faithful
than the rest,
Being as doubtful?

AIBRIC. I have called you master
Too many years to lift a hand against you.

FORGAEL. Maybe it is but natural to doubt
me.

You've never known, I'd lay a wager on it,
A melancholy that a cup of wine,
A lucky battle, or a woman's kiss
Could not amend.

AIBRIC. I have good spirits enough.
I've nothing to complain of but heartburn,
And that is cured by a boiled liquorice
root.

FORGAEL. If you will give me all your mind
awhile —
All, all, the very bottom of the bowl —
I'll show you that I am made differently,
That nothing can amend it but these waters,
Where I am rid of life — the events of the
world —
What do you call it? — that old promise-
breaker,

The cozening fortune-teller that comes whispering,

“You will have all you have wished for when
you have earned

Land for your children or money in a pot.”

And when we have it we are no happier,

Because of that old draught under the door,

Or creaky shoes. And at the end of all

We have been no better off than Seaghan the
fool,

That never did a hand's turn. Aibric!

Aibric!

We have fallen in the dreams the ever-living

Breathe on the burnished mirror of the
world,

And then smooth out with ivory hands and
sigh,

And find their laughter sweeter to the taste
For that brief sighing.

AIBRIC. If you had loved some woman ——

FORGAEL. You say that also? You have
heard the voices,

For that is what they say — all, all the shadows —

Aengus and Edain, those passionate wander-
ers,

And all the others; but it must be love
As they have known it. Now the secret's
out;

For it is love that I am seeking for,
But of a beautiful, unheard-of kind
That is not in the world.

AIBRIC. And yet the world
Has beautiful women to please every man.

FORGAEL. But he that gets their love after
the fashion

Loves in brief longing and deceiving hope
And bodily tenderness, and finds that even
The bed of love, that in the imagination
Had seemed to be the giver of all peace,
Is no more than a wine cup in the tasting,
And as soon finished.

AIBRIC. All that ever loved
Have loved that way — there is no other way.

FORGAEL. Yet never have two lovers kissed
but they
Believed there was some other near at hand,
And almost wept because they could not
find it.

AIBRIC. When they have twenty years; in
middle life

They take a kiss for what a kiss is worth,
And let the dream go by.

FORGAEL. It's not a dream,
But the reality that makes our passion
As a lamp shadow — no — no lamp, the sun.
What the world's million lips are thirsting for,
Must be substantial somewhere.

AIBRIC. I have heard the Druids
Mutter such things as they awake from
trance.

It may be that the ever-living know it —
No mortal can.

FORGAEL. Yes; if they give us help.

AIBRIC. They are besotting you as they
besot

The crazy herdsman that will tell his fellows
That he has been all night upon the hills,

Riding to hurley, or in the battle-host
With the ever-living.

FORGAEL. What if he speak the truth,
And for a dozen hours have been a part
Of that more powerful life?

AIBRIC. His wife knows better.
Has she not seen him lying like a log,
Or fumbling in a dream about the house?
And if she hear him mutter of wild riders,
She knows that it was but the cart-horse
 coughing
That set him to the fancy.

FORGAEL. All would be well
Could we but give us wholly to the dreams,
And get into their world that to the sense
Is shadow, and not linger wretchedly
Among substantial things; for it is dreams

That lift us to the flowing, changing world
That the heart longs for. What is love itself,
Even though it be the lightest of light love,
But dreams that hurry from beyond the world
To make low laughter more than meat and
 drink,
Though it but set us sighing. Fellow-wan-
 derer,
Could we but mix ourselves into a dream,
Not in its image on the mirror.

AIBRIC.

While

We're in the body that's impossible.

FORGAEL. And yet I cannot think they're
 leading me

To death; for they that promised to me love
As those that can outlive the moon have
 known it,

Had the world's total life gathered up, it
seemed,

Into their shining limbs — I've had great
teachers.

Aengus and Edain ran up out of the wave —
You'd never doubt that it was life they
promised

Had you looked on them face to face as I
did,

With so red lips, and running on such feet,
And having such wide-open, shining eyes.

AIBRIC. It's certain they are leading you
to death.

None but the dead, or those that never lived,
Can know that ecstasy. Forgael! Forgael!
They have bade you follow the man-headed
birds,

And you have told me that their journey lies
Towards the country of the dead.

FORGAEL.

What matter

If I am going to my death, for there,
Or somewhere, I shall find the love they have
promised.

That much is certain. I shall find a woman,
One of the ever-living, as I think —
One of the laughing people — and she and I
Shall light upon a place in the world's core,
Where passion grows to be a changeless thing,
Like charmed apples made of chrysoprased,
Or chrysoberyl, or beryl, or chrysolite;
And there, in juggleries of sight and sense,
Become one movement, energy, delight,
Until the overburthened moon is dead.

[*A number of SAILORS enter hurriedly from R.*]

FIRST SAILOR. Look there ! there in the
mist ! a ship of spice !

And we are almost on her !

SECOND SAILOR. We had not known
But for the ambergris and sandalwood.

FIRST SAILOR. No ; but opoponax and cin-
namon.

FORGAEL [*taking the tiller from AIBRIC*].

The ever-living have kept my bargain for me,
And paid you on the nail.

AIBRIC. Take up that rope
To make her fast while we are plundering her.

FIRST SAILOR. There is a king and queen
upon her deck,
And where there is one woman there'll be
others.

AIBRIC. Speak lower, or they'll hear.

FIRST SAILOR. They cannot hear;
They are too busy with each other. Look!
He has stooped down and kissed her on the
 lips.

SECOND SAILOR. When she finds out we
 have better men aboard
She may not be too sorry in the end.

FIRST SAILOR. She will be like a wild cat;
 for these queens
Care more about the kegs of silver and gold,
And the high fame that come to them in
 marriage,
Than a strong body and a ready hand.

FIRST SAILOR. There's nobody is natural
 but a robber,
And that is why the world totters about
Upon its bandy legs.

AIBRIC. Run at them now,
And overpower the crew while yet asleep!

[SAILORS *go out. Voices and the clashing
of swords are heard from the other ship,
which cannot be seen because of the sail.*]

A VOICE. Armed men have come upon us!
O, I am slain!

ANOTHER VOICE. Wake all below!

ANOTHER VOICE. Why have you broken
our sleep?

FIRST VOICE. Armed men have come upon
us! O, I am slain!

FORGAEL [*who has remained at the tiller*].
There! there they come! Gull, gannet,
or diver

But with a man's head, or a fair woman's,
They hover over the masthead awhile

To wait their friends; but when their friends
have come

They'll fly upon that secret way of theirs.

One — and one — a couple — five together.

And I will hear them talking in a minute.

Yes, voices! but I do not catch the words.

Now I can hear. There's one of them that
says:

“How light we are, now we are changed to
birds!”

Another answers: “Maybe we shall find

Our heart's desire now that we are so light.”

And then one asks another how he died,

And says: “A sword blade pierced me in my
sleep.”

And now they all wheel suddenly and fly

To the other side, and higher in the air.

And now a laggard with a woman's head
Comes crying: "I have run upon the sword.
I have fled to my beloved in the air,
In the waste of the high air, that we may
wander

Among the windy meadows of the dawn."
But why are they still waiting? why are
they

Circling and circling over the masthead?
What power that is more mighty than desire
To hurry to their hidden happiness
Withholds them now? Have the ever-living
ones

A meaning in that circling overhead?
But what's the meaning? [*He cries out.*]
Why do you linger there?

Why do you not run to your desire,

Now that you have happy winged bodies?

[His voice sinks again.]

Being too busy in the air and the high air,

They cannot hear my voice; but what's the
meaning?

*[The SAILORS have returned. DECTORA is
with them. She is dressed in pale green,
with copper ornaments on her dress, and has
a copper crown upon her head. Her hair is
dull red.]*

FORGAEL *[turning and seeing her]*. Why
are you standing with your eyes upon me?

You are not the world's core. O no, no, no!

That cannot be the meaning of the birds.

You are not its core. My teeth are in the
world,

But have not bitten yet.

DECTORA.

I am a queen,

And ask for satisfaction upon these

Who have slain my husband and laid hands
upon me.

*[Breaking loose from the SAILORS who are
holding her.]*

Let go my hands.

FORGAEL. Why do you cast a shadow?

Where do you come from? Who brought you
to this place?

They would not send me one that casts a
shadow.

DECTORA. Would that the storm that over-
threw my ships,

And drowned the treasures of nine conquered
nations,

And blew me hither to my lasting sorrow,

Had drowned me also. But, being yet alive,
I ask a fitting punishment for all
That raised their hands against him.

FORGAEL. There are some
That weigh and measure all in these waste
seas —

They that have all the wisdom that's in life,
And all that prophesying images
Made of dim gold rave out in secret tombs;
They have it that the plans of kings and
queens

Are dust on the moth's wing; that nothing
matters

But laughter and tears — laughter, laughter,
and tears;

That every man should carry his own soul
Upon his shoulders.

DECTORA. You've nothing but wild
words,

And I would know if you will give me
vengeance.

FORGAEL. When she finds out I will not let
her go —

When she knows that.

DECTORA. What is it that you
are muttering —

That you'll not let me go? I am a queen.

FORGAEL. Although you are more beautiful
than any,

I almost long that it were possible;

But if I were to put you on that ship,

With sailors that were sworn to do your will,

And you had spread a sail for home, a wind

Would rise of a sudden, or a wave so huge,

It had washed among the stars and put them
out,

And beat the bulwark of your ship on mine,

Until you stood before me on the deck —

As now.

DECTORA. Does wandering in these
desolate seas

And listening to the cry of wind and wave

Bring madness?

FORGAEL. Queen, I am not mad.

DECTORA. And yet you say the water and
the wind

Would rise against me.

FORGAEL. No, I am not mad —

If it be not that hearing messages

From lasting watchers, that outlive the moon,

At the most quiet midnight is to be stricken.

DECTORA. And did those watchers bid you
take me captive?

FORGAEL. Both you and I are taken in the
net.

It was their hands that plucked the winds
awake

And blew you hither; and their mouths have
promised

I shall have love in their immortal fashion.

They gave me that old harp of the nine spells

That is more mighty than the sun and moon,

Or than the shivering casting-net of the stars,

That none might take you from me.

DECTORA [*first trembling back from the
mast where the harp is, and then laughing*].

For a moment

Your raving of a message and a harp

More mighty than the stars half troubled me.
But all that's raving. Who is there can
compel

The daughter and granddaughter of kings
To be his bedfellow?

FORGAEL. Until your lips
Have called me their beloved, I'll not kiss
them.

DECTORA. My husband and my king died
at my feet,
And yet you talk of love.

FORGAEL. The movement of time
Is shaken in these seas, and what one does
One moment has no might upon the moment
That follows after.

DECTORA. I understand you now.
You have a Druid craft of wicked sound

Wrung from the cold women of the sea —
A magic that can call a demon up,
Until my body give you kiss for kiss.

FORGAEL. Your soul shall give the kiss.

DECTORA. I am not afraid,
While there's a rope to run into a noose
Or wave to drown. But I have done with
words,
And I would have you look into my face
And know that it is fearless.

FORGAEL. Do what you will,
For neither I nor you can break a mesh
Of the great golden net that is about us.

DECTORA. There's nothing in the world
that's worth a fear.

*[She passes FORGAEL and stands for a
moment looking into his face.]*

I have good reason for that thought.

*[She runs suddenly on to the raised part of
the poop.]*

And now

I can put fear away as a queen should.

*[She mounts on to the bulwark and turns
towards FORGAEL.]*

Fool, fool! Although you have looked into
my face

You do not see my purpose. I shall have gone
Before a hand can touch me.

FORGAEL *[folding his arms]*. My hands
are still;

The ever-living hold us. Do what you will,
You cannot leap out of the golden net.

FIRST SAILOR. No need to drown, for, if
you will pardon us

And measure out a course and bring us
home,

We'll put this man to death.

DECTORA.

I promise it.

FIRST SAILOR. There is none to take his
side.

AIBRIC. I'll strike a blow for him to give
him time

To cast his dreams away.

[AIBRIC goes in front of FORGAEL with drawn
sword. FORGAEL takes the harp.]

FIRST SAILOR.

No other'll do it.

[The SAILORS throw AIBRIC on one side. He
falls upon the deck towards the poop. They
lift their swords to strike FORGAEL, who is
about to play the harp. The stage begins
to darken. The SAILORS hesitate in fear.]

SECOND SAILOR. He has put a sudden darkness over the moon.

DECTORA. Nine swords with handles of rhinoceros horn

To him that strikes him first !

FIRST SAILOR. I will strike him first.

[*He goes close up to FORGAEL with his sword lifted. The harp begins to shine with many-coloured fire. The scene has become so dark that the only light is from the harp.*]

FIRST SAILOR [*shrinking 'back*]. He has caught the crescent moon out of the sky, And carries it between us.

SECOND SAILOR. Holy fire
Has come into the jewels of the harp
To burn us to the marrow if we strike.

DECTORA. I'll give a golden galley full of
fruit,
That has the heady flavour of new wine,
To him that wounds him to the death.

FIRST SAILOR. I'll do it.
For all his spells will vanish when he
dies,
Having their life in him.

SECOND SAILOR. Though it be the moon
That he is holding up between us there,
I will strike at him.

THE OTHERS. And I! And I! And I!
[FORGAEL *plays the harp.*]

FIRST SAILOR [*falling into a dream suddenly*]. But you were saying there is
somebody
Upon that other ship we are to wake.

You did not know what brought him to his
end,

But it was sudden.

SECOND SAILOR. You are in the right;
I had forgotten that we must go wake him.

DECTORA. He has flung a Druid spell upon
the air,
And set you dreaming.

SECOND SAILOR. How can we have a wake
When we have neither brown nor yellow
ale?

FIRST SAILOR. I saw a flagon of brown ale
aboard her.

THIRD SAILOR. How can we raise the keen
that do not know
What name to call him by?

FIRST SAILOR. Come to his ship.

/

His name will come into our thoughts in a
minute.

I know that he died a thousand years ago,
And has not yet been waked.

SECOND SAILOR [*beginning to keen*]. Ohone!

O! O! O!

The yew bough has been broken into two,
And all the birds are scattered.

ALL THE SAILORS.

O! O! O! O!

[*They go out keening.*]

DECTORA. Protect me now, gods, that my
people swear by.

[*AIBRIC has risen from the ground where he
had fallen. He has begun looking for his
sword as if in a dream.*]

AIBRIC. Where is my sword that fell out
of my hand

When I first heard the news? Ah, there it is!

[He goes dreamily towards the sword, but

DECTORA *runs at it and takes it up before
he can reach it.]*

AIBRIC *[sleepily]*. Queen, give it me.

DECTORA. No, I have need of it.

AIBRIC. Why do you need a sword? But
you may keep it,

Now that he's dead I have no need of it,

For everything is gone.

A SAILOR *[calling from the other ship]*.

Come hither, Aibric,

And tell me who it is that we are waking.

AIBRIC *[half to DECTORA, half to him-
self]*. What name had that dead king?

Arthur of Britain?

No, no — not Arthur. I remember now.

It was golden-armed Iollan, and he died
Brokenhearted, having lost his queen
Through wicked spells. That is not all the
tale,

For he was killed. O! O! O! O! O! O!

For golden-armed Iollan has been killed.

*[He goes out. While he has been speaking,
and through part of what follows, one
hears the wailing of the SAILORS from the
other ship. DECTORA stands with the
sword lifted in front of FORGAEL.]*

DECTORA. I will end all your magic on the
instant.

*[Her voice becomes dreamy, and she lowers
the sword slowly, and finally lets it fall.
She spreads out her hair. She takes off
her crown and lays it upon the deck.]*

This sword is to lie beside him in the grave.
It was in all his battles. I will spread my hair,
And wring my hands, and wail him bitterly,
For I have heard that he was proud and laugh-
ing,
Blue-eyed, and a quick runner on bare feet,
And that he died a thousand years ago.
O! O! O!

[FORGAEL *changes the tune.*]

But no, that is not it.
I knew him well, and while I heard him laugh-
ing
They killed him at my feet. O! O! O! O!
For golden-armed Iollan that I loved.
But what is it that made me say I loved him?
It was that harper put it in my thoughts,
But it is true. Why did they run upon him,

And beat the golden helmet with their
swords?

FORGAEL. Do you not know me, lady? I
am he

That you are weeping for.

DECTORA. No, for he is dead.

O! O! O! for golden-armed Iollan.

FORGAEL. It was so given out, but I will
prove

That the grave-diggers in a dreamy frenzy
Have buried nothing but my golden arms.
Listen to that low-laughing string of the moon
And you will recollect my face and voice,
For you have listened to me playing it
These thousand years.

*[He starts up, listening to the birds. The
harp slips from his hands, and remains*

leaning against the bulwarks behind him.

The light goes out of it.]

What are the birds at there?

Why are they all a-flutter of a sudden?

What are you calling out above the mast?

If railing and reproach and mockery

Because I have awakened her to love

My magic strings, I'll make this answer to it:

Being driven on by voices and by dreams

That were clear messages from the ever-living,

I have done right. What could I but obey?

And yet you make a clamour of reproach.

DECTORA [*laughing*]. Why, it's a wonder
out of reckoning

That I should keen him from the full of the
moon

To the horn, and he be hale and hearty.

FORGAEL. How have I wronged her now
that she is merry?

But no, no, no! your cry is not against me.
You know the councils of the ever-living,
And all that tossing of your wings is joy,
And all that murmuring's but a marriage song;
But if it be reproach, I answer this:
There is not one among you that made love
By any other means. You call it passion,
Consideration, generosity;
But it was all deceit, and flattery
To win a woman is in her own despite,
For love is war, and there is hatred in it;
And if you say that she came willingly ——

DECTORA. Why do you turn away and hide
your face,

That I would look upon for ever?

FORGAEL. My grief.

DECTORA. Have I not loved you for a
thousand years?

FORGAEL. I never have been golden-armed
Iollan.

DECTORA. I do not understand. I know
your face

Better than my own hands.

FORGAEL. I have deceived you
Out of all reckoning.

DECTORA. Is it not true
That you were born a thousand years ago,
In islands where the children of Aengus wind
In happy dances under a windy moon,
And that you'll bring me there?

FORGAEL. I have deceived you;
I have deceived you utterly.

DECTORA. How can that be?
Is it that though your eyes are full of love
Some other woman has a claim on you,
And I've but half?

FORGAEL. Oh, no !

DECTORA.

And if there is,
If there be half a hundred more, what matter ?
I'll never give another thought to it ;
No, no, nor half a thought ; but do not speak.
Women are hard and proud and stubborn-
hearted,
Their heads being turned with praise and
flattery ;
And that is why their lovers are afraid
To tell them a plain story.

FORGAEL. That's not the story;
But I have done so great a wrong against you,

There is no measure that it would not burst.

I will confess it all.

DECTORA. What do I care,

Now that my body has begun to dream,

And you have grown to be a burning sod

In the imagination and intellect?

If something that's most fabulous were true —

If you had taken me by magic spells,

And killed a lover or husband at my feet —

I would not let you speak, for I would know

That it was yesterday and not to-day

I loved him; I would cover up my ears,

As I am doing now. [*A pause.*] Why do

you weep?

FORGAEL. I weep because I've nothing for

your eyes

But desolate waters and a battered ship.

DECTORA. O, why do you not lift your eyes
to mine?

FORGAEL. I weep — I weep because bare
night's above,
And not a roof of ivory and gold.

DECTORA. I would grow jealous of the ivory
roof,
And strike the golden pillars with my hands.
I would that there was nothing in the world
But my beloved — that night and day had
perished,
And all that is and all that is to be,
All that is not the meeting of our lips.

FORGAEL. I too, I too. Why do you look
away?
Am I to fear the waves, or is the moon
My enemy?

DECTORA. I looked upon the moon,
Longing to knead and pull it into shape
That I might lay it on your head as a crown.
But now it is your thoughts that wander
away,
For you are looking at the sea. Do you not
know

How great a wrong it is to let one's thought
Wander a moment when one is in love?

*[He has moved away. She follows him. He
is looking out over the sea, shading his eyes.]*

DECTORA. Why are you looking at the sea?

FORGAEL. Look there!

DECTORA. What is there but a troop of ash-
grey birds
That fly into the west?

FORGAEL.

But listen, listen!

DECTORA. What is there but the crying of
the birds?

FORGAEL. If you'll but listen closely to that
crying

You'll hear them calling out to one another
With human voices.

DECTORA. O, I can hear them now.
What are they? Unto what country do
they fly?

FORGAEL. To unimaginable happiness
They have been circling over our heads in the
air,
But now that they have taken to the road
We have to follow, for they are our
pilots;
And though they're but the colour of grey
ash,

They're crying out, could you but hear their
words,

"There is a country at the end of the world
Where no child's born but to outlive the
moon."

[*The SAILORS come in with AIBRIC. They
are in great excitement.*]

FIRST SAILOR. The hold is full of treasure.

SECOND SAILOR. Full to the hatches.

FIRST SAILOR. Treasure and treasure.

THIRD SAILOR. Boxes of precious spice.

FIRST SAILOR. Ivory images with amethyst
eyes.

THIRD SAILOR. Dragons with eyes of
ruby.

FIRST SAILOR. The whole ship

Flashes as if it were a net of herrings.

THIRD SAILOR. Let's home; I'd give some rubies to a woman.

SECOND SAILOR. There's somebody I'd give the amethyst eyes to.

FIRST SAILOR. Let's home and spend it in our villages.

AIBRIC [*silencing them with a gesture*]. We would return to our own country, Forgael, For we have found a treasure that's so great Imagination cannot reckon it. And having lit upon this woman there, What more have you to look for on the seas?

FORGAEL. I cannot — I am going on to the end.

As for this woman, I think she is coming with me.

AIBRIC. The ever-living have made you
mad; but no,

It was this woman in her woman's vengeance
That drove you to it, and I fool enough
To fancy that she'd bring you home again.
'Twas you that egged him to it, for you know
That he is being driven to his death.

DECTORA. That is not true, for he has prom-
ised me

An unimaginable happiness.

AIBRIC. And if that happiness be more than
dreams,
More than the froth, the feather, the dustwhirl,
The crazy nothing that I think it is,
It shall be in the country of the dead,
If there be such a country.

DECTORA.

No, not there,

But in some island where the life of the world
Leaps upward, as if all the streams o' the
world

Had run into one fountain.

AIBRIC.

Speak to him.

He knows that he is taking you to death;
He cannot contradict me.

DECTORA.

Is that true?

FORGAEL. I do not know for certain, but
I know

That I have the best of pilots.

AIBRIC.

Shadows, illusions,

That the shape-changers, the ever-laughing
ones,

The immortal mockers have cast into his
mind,

Or called before his eyes.

DECTORA.

O carry me

To some sure country, some familiar place.

Have we not everything that life can give

In having one another?

FORGAEL.

How could I rest

If I refused the messengers and pilots

With all those sights and all that crying out?

DECTORA. But I will cover up your eyes
and ears,

That you may never hear the cry of the
birds,

Or look upon them.

FORGAEL.

Were they but lowlier

I'd do your will, but they are too high — too
high.

DECTORA. Being too high, their heady
prophecies

But harry us with hopes that come to nothing,
Because we are not proud, imperishable,
Alone and winged.

FORGAEL. Our love shall be like theirs
When we have put their changeless image on.

DECTORA. I am a woman, I die at every
breath.

AIBRIC. Let the birds scatter for the tree
is broken.

And there's no help in words. [*To the*

SAILORS.] To the other ship,

And I will follow you and cut the rope
When I have said farewell to this man here,
For neither I nor any living man
Will look upon his face again.

FORGAEL [*to* DECTORA]. Go with him,
For he will shelter you and bring you home.

AIBRIC [*taking FORGAEL's hand*]. I'll do
it for his sake.

DECTORA. No. Take this sword
And cut the rope, for I go on with Forgael.

AIBRIC [*half falling into the keen*]. The yew
bough has been broken in two,
And all the birds are scattered — O! O! O!
Farewell! farewell! [*He goes out.*]

DECTORA. The sword is in the rope —
The rope's in two — it falls into the sea,
It whirls into the foam. O ancient worm,
Dragon that loved the world and held us to it,
You are broken, you are broken. The world
drifts away,
And I am left alone with my beloved,
Who cannot put me from his sight for ever.
We are alone for ever, and I laugh,

Forgael, because you cannot put me from you.
The mist has covered the heavens, and you
and I

Shall be alone for ever. We two — this
crown —

I half remember it has been in my dreams,
Bend lower, O king, that I may crown you
with it.

O flower of the branch, O bird among the
leaves,

O silver fish that my two hands have taken
Out of the running stream, O morning star,
Trembling in the blue heavens like a white
fawn

Upon the misty border of the wood,
Bend lower, that I may cover you with my
hair,

For he will gaze upon this world no longer.

*[The scene darkens, and the harp once more
begins to burn as with fire.]*

FORGAEL *[gathering DECTORA'S hair about
him]*. Beloved, having dragged the net
about us,

And knitted mesh to mesh, we grow immortal,

And that old harp awakens of itself

To cry aloud to the grey birds, and dreams,

That have had dreams for fathers, live in us.

ON BAILE'S STRAND

TO WILLIAM FAY

*Because of the beautiful phantasy of his
playing in the part of the FOOL.*

PERSONS

A FOOL

A BLIND MAN

CUCHULAIN, KING OF MUIRTHEMNE

CONCHOBAR, HIGH KING OF ULSTER

A YOUNG MAN

KINGS AND WOMEN

ON BAILE'S STRAND

SCENE. *A great hall at Dundevalgan, not "Cuchulain's great ancient house" but an assembly house nearer to the sea. A big door at the back, and through the door misty light as of sea mist. There are many chairs and one long bench. One of these chairs, which is towards the front of the stage, is bigger than the others. Somewhere at the back there is a table with flagons of ale upon it and drinking horns. There is a small door at one side of the hall. A FOOL and BLIND MAN, both ragged, come in through the door at the back. The BLIND MAN leans upon a staff.*

FOOL. What a clever man you are though you are blind ! There's nobody with two eyes in his head that is as clever as you are. Who but you could have thought that the hen wife sleeps every day a little at noon ? I would never be able to steal anything if you didn't tell me where to look for it. And what a good cook you are ! You take the fowl out of my hands after I have stolen it and plucked it, and you put it into the big pot at the fire there, and I can go out and run races with the witches at the edge of the waves and get an appetite, and when I've got it, there's the hen waiting inside for me, done to the turn.

BLIND MAN [*who is feeling about with his stick*]. Done to the turn.

FOOL [*putting his arm round* BLIND MAN'S *neck*]. Come now, I'll have a leg and you'll have a leg, and we'll draw lots for the wish-bone. I'll be praising you, I'll be praising you, while we're eating it, for your good plans and for your good cooking. There's nobody in the world like you, Blind Man. Come, come. Wait a minute. I shouldn't have closed the door. There are some that look for me, and I wouldn't like them not to find me. Don't tell it to anybody, Blind Man. There are some that follow me. Boann herself out of the river and Fand out of the deep sea. Witches they are, and they come by in the wind, and they cry, "Give a kiss, Fool, give a kiss," that's what they cry. That's wide enough. All the witches can come in

now. I wouldn't have them beat at the door and say: "Where is the Fool? Why has he put a lock on the door?" Maybe they'll hear the bubbling of the pot and come in and sit on the ground. But we won't give them any of the fowl. Let them go back to the sea, let them go back to the sea.

BLIND MAN [*feeling legs of big chair with his hands*]. Ha! [*Then, in a louder voice as he feels the back of it.*] Ah! ah!

FOOL. Why do you say A-h!

BLIND MAN. I know the big chair. It is to-day the High King is coming. They have brought out his chair. He is going to be Cuchulain's master in earnest from this day out. It is that he's coming for.

FOOL. He must be a great man to be Cuchulain's master.

BLIND MAN. So he is. He is a great man. He is over all the rest of the kings of Ireland.

FOOL. Cuchulain's master! I thought Cuchulain could do anything he liked.

BLIND MAN. So he did, so he did. But he ran too wild, and Conchobar is coming to-day to put an oath upon him that will stop his rambling and make him as biddable as a house dog and keep him always at his hand. He will sit in this chair and put the oath upon him.

FOOL. How will he do that?

BLIND MAN. You have no wits to understand such things. [*The BLIND MAN has got into the chair.*] He will sit up in this chair and he'll say: "Take the oath, Cuchulain. I

bid you take the oath. Do as I tell you. What are your wits compared with mine, and what are your riches compared with mine? And what sons have you to pay your debts and to put a stone over you when you die? Take the oath, I tell you. Take a strong oath."

FOOL [*crumpling himself up and whining*]. I will not. I'll take no oath. I want my dinner.

BLIND MAN. Hush, hush! It is not done yet.

FOOL. You said it was done to a turn.

BLIND MAN. Did I now? Well, it might be done, and not done. The wings might be white, but the legs might be red. The flesh might stick hard to the bones and not come

away in the teeth. But, believe me, Fool, it will be well done before you put your teeth in it.

FOOL. My teeth are growing long with the hunger.

BLIND MAN. I'll tell you a story — the kings have story-tellers while they are waiting for their dinner — I will tell you a story with a fight in it, a story with a champion in it, and ship and queen, a son that has his mind set on killing somebody that you and I know.

FOOL. Who is that? Who is he coming to kill?

BLIND MAN. Wait now till you hear. When you were stealing the fowl, I was lying in a hole in the sand, and I heard three men

coming with a shuffling sort of noise. They were wounded and groaning.

FOOL. Go on. Tell me about the fight.

BLIND MAN. There had been a fight, a great fight, a tremendous great fight. A young man had landed on the shore, the guardians of the shore had asked his name, and he had refused to tell it, and he had killed one, and others had run away.

FOOL. That's enough. Come on now to the fowl. I wish it was bigger. I wish it was as big as a goose . . .

BLIND MAN. Hush! I haven't told you all. I know who that young man is. I heard the men who were running away say he had red hair, that he had come from Aoife's country, that he was coming to kill Cuchulain.

FOOL. Nobody can do that
Cuchulain has killed kings,
Kings and sons of kings,
Dragons out of the water,
And witches out of the air,

Banachas and Bonachas and people of the
woods.

BLIND MAN. Hush! hush!

FOOL. Witches that steal the milk,
Fomor that steal the children,
Hags that have heads like hares,
Hares that have claws like
witches,

All riding a cock horse
Out of the very bottom of the bitter black
north.

BLIND MAN. Hush, I say!

FOOL. Does Cuchulain know that he is coming to kill him?

BLIND MAN. How would he know that with his head in the clouds? He doesn't care for common fighting. Why would he put himself out, and nobody in it but a young man? Now if it were a white fawn that might turn into a queen before morning . . .

FOOL. Come to the fowl . . . I wish it was as big as a pig . . . a fowl with goose grease and pig's crackling.

BLIND MAN. No hurry, no hurry. I know whose son it is. I wouldn't tell anybody else, but I will tell you,—a secret is better to you than your dinner. You like being told secrets.

FOOL. Tell me the secret.

BLIND MAN. That young man is Aoife's son. I am sure it is Aoife's son, it is borne in upon me that it is Aoife's son. You have often heard me talking of Aoife, the great woman-fighter Cuchulain got the mastery over in the north.

FOOL. I know, I know. She is one of those cross queens that lives in hungry Scotland.

BLIND MAN. I am sure it is her son. I was in Aoife's country for a long time.

FOOL. That was before you were blinded for putting a curse upon the wind.

BLIND MAN. There was a boy in her house that had her own red colour on him and everybody said he was to be brought up to kill Cuchulain, that she hated Cuchulain. She

used to put a helmet on a pillar-stone and call it Cuchulain and set him casting at it. There is a step outside — Cuchulain's step. [CUCHULAIN *passes by in the mist outside the big door.*]

FOOL. Where is Cuchulain going?

BLIND MAN. He is going to meet Conchobar that has bidden him to take the oath.

FOOL. Ah, an oath, Blind Man. How can I remember so many things at once? Who is going to take an oath?

BLIND MAN. Cuchulain is going to take an oath to Conchobar who is High King.

FOOL. What a mix-up you make of everything, Blind Man. You were telling me one story, and now you are telling me another story . . . How can I get the hang of it

at the end if you mix everything at the beginning? Wait till I settle it out. There now, there's Cuchulain [*He points to one foot.*], and there is the young man [*He points to the other foot.*] that is coming to kill him, and Cuchulain doesn't know, but where's Conchobar? [*Takes bag from side.*] That's Conchobar with all his riches — Cuchulain, young man, Conchobar — And where's Aoife? [*Throws up cap.*] There is Aoife, high up on the mountains in high hungry Scotland. Maybe it is not true after all. Maybe it was your own making up. It's many a time you cheated me before with your lies. Come to the cooking pot, my stomach is pinched and rusty. Would you have it to be creaking like a gate?

BLIND MAN. I tell you it's true. And more

than that is true. If you listen to what I say, you'll forget your stomach . . .

FOOL. I won't.

BLIND MAN. I know who the young man's father is, but I won't say. I would be afraid to say. Ah, Fool, you would forget everything if you could know who the young man's father is.

FOOL. Who is it? Tell me now quick, or I'll shake you. Come, out with it, or I'll shake you.

BLIND MAN. Wait, wait. There's somebody coming. It is Cuchulain is coming. He's coming back with the High King. Go and ask Cuchulain. He'll tell you. It's little you'll care about the cooking pot when you have asked Cuchulain that . . .

FOOL. I'll ask him. Cuchulain will know. He was in Aoife's country. [*Goes up stage.*]

I'll ask him. [*Turns and goes down stage.*]

But, no. I won't ask him, I would be afraid.

[*Going up again.*] Yes, I will ask him. What

harm in asking? The Blind Man said I was

to ask him. [*Going down.*] No, no. I'll not

ask him. He might kill me. I have but

killed hens and geese and pigs. He has killed

kings. [*Goes up again almost to big door.*]

Who says I'm afraid? I'm not afraid. I'm

no coward. I'll ask him. No, no, Cuchulain,

I'm not going to ask you.

He has killed kings,

Kings and the sons of kings,

Dragons out of the water,

And witches out of the air,

Banachas and Bonachas and people of the

woods.

[FOOL goes out side door, the last words being
heard outside.]

[CUCHULAIN and CONCHOBAR enter through
the big door at the back. While they are still
outside, CUCHULAIN'S voice is heard raised
in anger. He is a dark man, something over
forty years of age. CONCHOBAR is much
older and carries a long staff, elaborately
carved, or with an elaborate gold handle.]

CUCHULAIN. Because I have killed men
without your bidding

And have rewarded others at my own
pleasure,

Because of half a score of trifling things

You'd lay this oath upon me, and now and
now

You add another pebble to the heap.

CUCHULAIN. And I must be obedient in all
things;

Give up my will to yours; go where you please;
Come when you call; sit at the council-board
Among the unshapely bodies of old men.

I whose mere name has kept this country safe,
I that in early days have driven out
Maeve of Cruachan and the northern pirates,
The hundred kings of Sorchu, and the kings
Out of the garden in the east of the world.

Must I, that held you on the throne when all
Had pulled you from it, swear obedience
As if I were some cattle-raising king?

Are my shins speckled with the heat of the
fire,

Or have my hands no skill but to make figures
Upon the ashes with a stick? Am I

So slack and idle that I need a whip
Before I serve you?

CONCHOBAR. No, no whip, Cuchulain,
But every day my children come and say
This man is growing harder to endure.
How can we be at safety with this man
That nobody can buy or bid or bind?
We shall be at his mercy when you are gone;
He burns the earth as if he were a fire,
And time can never touch him.

CUCHULAIN. And so the tale
Grows finer yet; and I am to obey
Whatever child you set upon the throne,
As if it were yourself.

CONCHOBAR. Most certainly.
I am High King, my son shall be High King.
And you for all the wildness of your blood,

And though your father came out of the sun,
Are but a little king and weigh but light
In anything that touches government,
If put into the balance with my children.

CUCHULAIN. It's well that we should speak
our minds out plainly,
For when we die we shall be spoken of
In many countries. We in our young days
Have seen the heavens like a burning cloud
Brooding upon the world, and being more
Than men can be now that cloud's lifted up,
We should be the more truthful. Conchobar,
I do not like your children—they have no pith,
No marrow, in their bones, and will lie soft
Where you and I lie hard.

CONCHOBAR. You rail at them
Because you have no children of your own.

CUCHULAIN. I think myself most lucky that

I leave

No pallid ghost or mockery of a man

To drift and mutter in the corridors,

Where I have laughed and sung.

CONCHOBAR.

That is not true

For all your boasting of the truth between

us.

For, there is none that having house and

lands,

That have been in the one family

And called by the one name for centuries,

But is made miserable if he know

They are to pass into a stranger's keeping,

As yours will pass.

CUCHULAIN. The most of men feel that,

But you and I leave names upon the harp.

CONCHOBAR. You play with arguments as
lawyers do,
And put no heart in them. I know your
thoughts,
For we have slept under the one cloak and
drunk
From the one wine cup. I know you to the
bone.
I have heard you cry, aye in your very sleep,
“I have no son,” and with such bitterness
That I have gone upon my knees and prayed
That it might be amended.

CUCHULAIN. For you thought
That I should be as biddable as others
Had I their reason for it, but that's not true,
For I would need a weightier argument
Than one that marred me in the copying,

As I have that clean hawk out of the air
That, as men say, begot this body of mine
Upon a mortal woman.

CONCHOBAR. Now as ever
You mock at every reasonable hope,
And would have nothing, or impossible things.
What eye has ever looked upon the child
Would satisfy a mind like that?

CUCHULAIN. I would leave
My house and name to none that would not
face
Even myself in battle.

CONCHOBAR. Being swift of foot
And making light of every common chance,
You should have overtaken on the hills
Some daughter of the air, or on the shore
A daughter of the country-under-wave.

CUCHULAIN. I am not blasphemous.

CONCHOBAR. Yet you despise

Our queens, and would not call a child your
own,

If one of them had borne him.

CUCHULAIN. I have not said it.

CONCHOBAR. Ah! I remember I have heard
you boast,

When the ale was in your blood, that there
was one

In Scotland, where you had learnt the trade of
war,

That had a stone-pale cheek and red-brown
hair.

And that although you had loved other women,
You'd sooner that fierce woman of the camp
Bore you a son than any queen among them.

CUCHULAIN. You call her a "fierce woman
of the camp,"

For having lived among the spinning wheels,
You'd have no woman near that would not
say,

"Ah! how wise!" "What will you have for
supper?"

"What shall I wear that I may please you,
sir?"

And keep that humming through the day and
night

For ever — a fierce woman of the camp —

But I am getting angry about nothing.

You have never seen her, ah! Conchobar, had
you seen her

With that high, laughing, turbulent head of
hers

Thrown backward and the bow-string at her
ear,

Or sitting at the fire with those grave eyes
Full of good counsel as it were with wine,
Or when love ran through all the lineaments
Of her wild body — although she had no child,
None other had all beauty, queen, and lover,
Or was so fitted to give birth to kings.

CONCHOBAR. There's nothing I can say but
drifts you farther

From the one weighty matter — that very
woman —

For I know well that you are praising Aoife —
Now hates you and will leave no subtilty
Unknotted that might run into a noose
About your throat — no army in idleness
That might bring ruin on this land you serve.

CUCHULAIN. No wonder in that, no wonder
at all in that.

I never have known love but as a kiss
In the mid battle, and a difficult truce
Of oil and water, candles and dark night,
Hillside and hollow, the hot-footed sun,
And the cold, sliding, slippery-footed moon,
A brief forgiveness between opposites
That have been hatreds for three times the
age
Of this long 'stablished ground.

CONCHOBAR.

Listen to me.

Aoife makes war on us, and every day
Our enemies grow greater and beat the
walls
More bitterly, and you within the walls
Are every day more turbulent, and yet,

When I would speak about these things, your
mind

Runs as it were a swallow on the wind.

*[Outside the door in the blue light of the sea
mist are many old and young KINGS, amongst
them are three WOMEN, two of whom carry a
bowl full of fire. The third, in what follows,
puts from time to time fragrant herbs into the
fire so that it flickers up into brighter flame.]*

Look at the door and what men gather
there,

Old counsellors that steer the land with me,
And younger kings, the dancers and harp
players

That follow in your tumults, and all these
Are held there by the one anxiety.

Will you be bound into obedience

And so make this land safe for them and
theirs?

You are but half a king and I but half;
I need your might of hand and burning heart,
And you my wisdom.

CUCHULAIN [*going near to door*]. Nestlings
of a high nest,
Hawks that have followed me into the air
And looked upon the sun, we'll out of this
And sail upon the wind once more. This king
Would have me take an oath to do his will
And having listened to his tune from morning,
I will no more of it. Run to the stable
And set the horses to the chariot pole,
And send a messenger to the harp players.
We'll find a level place among the woods,
And dance awhile.

A YOUNG KING. Cuchulain, take the
oath.

There is none here that would not have you
take it.

CUCHULAIN. You'd have me take it? Are
you of one mind?

THE KINGS. All, all, all, all.

A YOUNG KING. Do what the High King
bids you.

CONCHOBAR. There is not one but dreads
this turbulence

Now that they're settled men.

CUCHULAIN. Are you so changed,
Or have I grown more dangerous of late?
But that's not it. I understand it all.
It's you that have changed. You've wives
and children now,

And for that reason cannot follow one
That lives like a bird's flight from tree to
tree . . .

It's time the years put water in my blood
And drowned the wildness of it, for all's
changed,

But that unchanged . . . I'll take what
oath you will,

The moon, the sun, the water, light, or air,
I do not care how binding.

CONCHOBAR.

On this fire

That has been lighted from your hearth and
mine.

The older men shall be my witnesses,
The younger, yours. The holders of the fire
Shall purify the thresholds of the house
With waving fire, and shut the outer door

According to the custom; and sing rhymes
That have come down from the old law-
makers
To blow the witches out. Considering
That the wild will of man could be oath-
bound,
But that a woman's could not, they bid us
sing
Against the will of woman at its wildest
In the shape changers that run upon the
wind.

[CONCHOBAR *has gone on to his throne.*]

THE WOMEN [*they sing in a very low voice
after the first few words so that the others all
but drowned their words*]. May this fire
have driven out

The shape changers that can put

Ruin on a great king's house
Until all be ruinous.
Names whereby a man has known
The threshold and the hearthstone,
Gather on the wind and drive
The women, none can kiss and thrive,
For they are but whirling wind,
Out of memory and mind.
They would make a prince decay
With light images of clay,
Planted in the running wave,
Or, for many shapes they have,
They would change them into hounds,
Until he had died of his wounds,
Though the change were but a whim;
Or they'd hurl a spell at him
That he follow with desire

Bodies that can never tire;
Or grow kind, for they anoint
All their bodies, joint by joint,
With a miracle-working juice
That is made out of the grease
Of the ungoverned unicorn.
But the man is twice forlorn,
Emptied, ruined, wracked, and lost,
That they follow, for at most
They will give him kiss for kiss;
While they murmur, "After this
Hatred may be sweet to the taste."
Those wild hands that have embraced
All his body can but shove
At the burning wheel of love,
Till the side of hate comes up;
Therefore in this ancient cup

May the sword blades drink their fill
Of the homebrew there, until
They will have for masters none
But the threshold and hearthstone.

CUCHULAIN [*speaking, while they are singing*]. I'll take and keep this oath, and from
this day

I shall be what you please, my chicks, my nest-
lings.

Yet I had thought you were of those that
praised

Whatever life could make the pulse run
quickly,

Even though it was brief, and that you held
That a free gift was better than a forced —
But that's all over — I will keep it, too.

I never gave a gift and took it again.

If the wild horse should break the chariot-
pole,

It would be punished. Should that be in the
oath?

*[Two of the WOMEN, still singing, crouch in
front of him holding the bowl over their heads.
He spreads his hands over the flame.]*

I swear to be obedient in all things
To Conchobar, and to uphold his children.

CONCHOBAR. We are one being, as these
flames are one:

I give my wisdom, and I take your strength.
Now thrust the swords into the flame, and
pray

That they may serve the threshold and the
hearthstone

With faithful service.

[*The KINGS kneel in a semicircle before the two WOMEN and CUCHULAIN, who thrusts his sword into the flame. They all put the points of their swords into the flame. The third woman is at the back near the big door.*]

CUCHULAIN. O pure, glittering ones
That should be more than wife or friend or
 mistress,
Give us the enduring will, the unquenchable
 hope,
The friendliness of the sword!—

[*The song grows louder, and the last words ring out clearly. There is a low knocking at the door, and a cry of "Open, open."*]

CONCHOBAR. Some king that has been
 loitering on the way.

Open the door, for I would have all know

That the oath's finished and Cuchulain bound,
And that the swords are drinking up the flame.

[*The door is opened by the third WOMAN, and
a YOUNG MAN with a drawn sword enters.*]

YOUNG MAN. I am of Aoife's army.

[*The KINGS rush towards him. CUCHULAIN
thrusts his sword between.*]

CUCHULAIN. Put up your swords,
He is but one. Aoife is far away.

YOUNG MAN. I have come alone into the
midst of you
To weigh this sword against Cuchulain's
sword.

CONCHOBAR. And are you noble? for if of
common seed,
You cannot weigh your sword against his
sword

But in mixed battle.

YOUNG MAN. I am under bonds
To tell my name to no man; but it's noble.

CONCHOBAR. But I would know your name
and not your bonds.

You cannot speak in the Assembly House,
If you are not noble.

FIRST OLD KING. Answer the High King!

YOUNG MAN. I will give no other proof
than the hawk gives —

That it's no sparrow!

[He is silent for a moment then speaks to all.]

Yet look upon me, kings.

I, too, am of that ancient seed, and carry
The signs about this body and in these bones.

CUCHULAIN. To have shown the hawk's
grey feather is enough,

And you speak highly, too. Give me that
helmet.

I'd thought they had grown weary sending
champions.

That sword and belt will do. This fighting's
welcome.

The High King there has promised me his
wisdom;

But the hawk's sleepy till its well-beloved
Cries out amid the acorns, or it has seen
Its enemy like a speck upon the sun.

What's wisdom to the hawk, when that clear
eye

Is burning nearer up in the high air?

[*Looks hard at YOUNG MAN; then comes
down steps and grasps YOUNG MAN by
shoulder.*]

Hither into the light. [To CONCHOBAR.]

The very tint

Of her that I was speaking of but now.

Not a pin's difference. [To YOUNG MAN.]

You are from the

North

Where there are many that have that tint of
hair —

Red-brown, the light red-brown. Come
nearer, boy,

For I would have another look at you.

There's more likeness — a pale, a stone-pale
cheek.

What brought you, boy? Have you no fear
of death?

YOUNG MAN. Whether I live or die is in
the Gods' hands.

CUCHULAIN. That is all words, all words,
a young man's talk.

I am their plough, their harrow, their very
strength;

For he that's in the sun begot this body
Upon a mortal woman, and I have heard tell
It seemed as if he had outrun the moon;
That he must always follow through waste
heaven,

He loved so happily. He'll be but slow
To break a tree that was so sweetly planted.
Let's see that arm. I'll see it if I like.
That arm had a good father and a good
mother,

But it is not like this.

YOUNG MAN. You are mocking me;
You think I am not worthy to be fought.

But I'll not wrangle but with this talkative
knife.

CUCHULAIN. Put up your sword; I am
not mocking you.

I'd have you for my friend, but if it's not
Because you have a hot heart and a cold eye,
I cannot tell the reason. [*To CONCHOBAR.*]

He has got her fierceness.

And nobody is as fierce as those pale women.

But I will keep him with me, Conchobar,

That he may set my memory upon her

When the day's fading — you will stop with us,

And we will hunt the deer and the wild bulls;

And, when we have grown weary, light our
fires

Between the wood and water or on some
mountain

Where the shape changers of the morning
come.

The High King there would make a mock of
me

Because I did not take a wife among them.

Why do you hang your head—it's a good life:

The head grows prouder in the light of the
dawn,

And friendship thickens in the murmuring
dark

Where the spare hazels meet the wool-white
foam.

But I can see there's no more need for words

And that you'll be my friend from this day
out.

CONCHOBAR. He has come thither not in
his own name

But in Queen Aoife's, and has challenged you
Because you are the foremost man of us all —

CUCHULAIN. Well, well, what matter?

CONCHOBAR. You think it does not matter;
And that a fancy lighter than the air,
A whim of the moment has more matter
in it.

For having none that shall reign after you,
You cannot think as I do, who would leave
A throne too high for insult.

CUCHULAIN. Let your children
Re-mortar their inheritance, as we have,
And put more muscle on — I will give you
gifts,
But I'll have something too — that arm ring,
boy.

We'll have the quarrel out when you are older.

YOUNG MAN. There is no man I'd sooner
have my friend
Than you, whose name has gone about the
world
As if it had been the wind, but Aoife'd say
I had turned coward.

CUCHULAIN. I will give you gifts
That Aoife'll know, and all her people know,
To have come from me. [*Showing cloak.*]
My father gave me this.
He came to try me, rising up at dawn
Out of the cold dark of the rich sea.
He challenged me to battle, but before
My sword had touched his sword, told me his
name,
Gave me this cloak, and vanished. It was
woven

By women of the Country-under-Wave
Out of the fleeces of the sea. O! tell her
I was afraid, or tell her what you will.
No; tell her that I heard a raven croak
On the north side of the house, and was afraid.

CONCHOBAR. Some witch of the air has
troubled Cuchulain's mind.

CUCHULAIN. No witchcraft. His head is
like a woman's head

I had a fancy for.

CONCHOBAR. A witch of the air
Can make a leaf confound us with memories.
They run upon the wind and hurl the spells
That make us nothing, out of the invisible
wind.

They have gone to school to learn the trick of
it.

CUCHULAIN. No, no — there's nothing out
of common here.

The winds are innocent — that arm ring, boy.

A KING. If I've your leave, I'll take this
challenge up.

ANOTHER KING. No, give it me, High
King, for this wild Aoife
Has carried off my slaves.

ANOTHER KING. No, give it to me,
For she has harried me in house and herd.

ANOTHER KING. I claim the fight.

OTHER KINGS [*together*]. And I! And I!
And I.

CUCHULAIN. Back! back! Put up your
swords! Put up your swords.

There's none alive that shall accept a challenge
I have refused. Laegaire, put up your sword.

YOUNG MAN. No, let them come. If
they've a mind for it,

I'll try it out with any two together.

CUCHULAIN. That's spoken as I'd have
spoken it at your age.

But you are in my house. Whatever man
Would fight with you shall fight it out with
me.

They're dumb, they're dumb. How many
of you would meet [Draws sword.]

This mutterer, this old whistler, this sand-
piper,

This edge that's greyer than the tide, this
mouse

That's gnawing at the timbers of the world,
This, this — Boy, I would meet them all
in arms

If I'd a son like you. He would avenge
me

When I have withstood for the last time the
men

Whose fathers, brothers, sons, and friends I
have killed

Upholding Conchobar, when the four prov-
inces

Have gathered with the ravens over them.

But I'd need no avenger. You and I

Would scatter them like water from a dish.

YOUNG MAN. We'll stand by one another
from this out.

Here is the ring.

CUCHULAIN. No, turn and turn about.

But my turn's first because I am the older.

[*Taking up cloak.*]

Nine queens out of the Country-under-Wave
Have woven it with the fleeces of the sea
And they were long embroidering at it — Boy,
If I had fought my father, he'd have killed me.
As certainly as if I had a son
And fought with him, I should be deadly to
him.

For the old fiery fountains are far off
And every day there is less heat o' the blood.

CONCHOBAR [*in a loud voice*]. No more of
this. I will not have this friendship.

Cuchulain is my man, and I forbid it.

He shall not go unfought, for I myself —

CUCHULAIN. I will not have it.

CONCHOBAR. You lay commands on me?

CUCHULAIN [*seizing CONCHOBAR*]. You shall
not stir, High King. I'll hold you there.

CONCHOBAR. Witchcraft has maddened you.

THE KINGS [*shouting*]. Yes, witchcraft,
witchcraft!

FIRST OLD KING. Some witch has worked
upon your mind, Cuchulain.

The head of that young man seemed like a
woman's

You'd had a fancy for. Then of a sudden
You laid your hands on the High King himself!

CUCHULAIN. And laid my hands on the
High King himself!

CONCHOBAR. Some witch is floating in the
air above us.

CUCHULAIN. Yes, witchcraft, witchcraft.
Witches of the air.

[*To YOUNG MAN.*]

Which of the shape changers put you to it?

Why did you? Who was it set you to this work?

Out, out! I say, for now it's sword on sword!

YOUNG MAN. But . . . but I did not.

CUCHULAIN. Out, I say, out, out!

[YOUNG MAN *goes out, followed by CUCHULAIN. The KINGS follow.*]

KINGS. Hurry, hurry! We'll be too late.
Go quicker through the door! Quicker,
quicker! [*Making a confused noise. The three WOMEN are left alone. One is standing by the door. Two remain at one side, holding bowl.*]

FIRST WOMAN. I have seen, I have seen!

SECOND WOMAN. What do you cry aloud?

FIRST WOMAN. The ever-living have shown
me what's to come.

THIRD WOMAN. How? Where?

FIRST WOMAN. In the ashes of the bowl.

SECOND WOMAN. While you were holding
it between your hands?

THIRD WOMAN. Speak quickly.

FIRST WOMAN. I have seen Cuchulain's
roof-tree

Leap into fire, and the walls split and blacken.

SECOND WOMAN. Cuchulain has gone out
to die.

THIRD WOMAN. O! O!

SECOND WOMAN. Who could have thought
that one so great as he
Should meet his end at this unnoted sword?

FIRST WOMAN. Life drifts between a fool
and a blind man

To the end, and nobody can know his end.

SECOND WOMAN. Come, look upon the
quenching of this greatness.

[The other two go to the door, but they stop for a moment upon the threshold and wail.]

FIRST WOMAN. No crying out, for there'll be need of cries

And knocking at the breast when it's all finished.

[The WOMEN go out. There is a sound of clashing swords from time to time during what follows.]

[Enter the FOOL dragging the BLIND MAN.]

FOOL. You have eaten it, you have eaten it. You have left me nothing but the bones.

[He throws BLIND MAN down by big chair.]

BLIND MAN. O that I should have to endure such a plague! O I ache all over! O I am pulled to pieces! This is the way you pay me all the good I have done you.

FOOL. You have eaten it. You have told me lies. You said it was done to a turn. You had eaten it all the time.

BLIND MAN. What would have happened to you but for me, and you without your wits? If I did not take care of you, what would you do for food and warmth?

FOOL. You take care of me! You stay safe and send me into every kind of danger. You sent me down the cliff for gulls' eggs, while you warmed your blind eyes in the sun; and then you ate all that were good for food. You left me the eggs that were neither egg nor bird. [BLIND MAN *tries to rise*. FOOL *makes him lie down again*.] Keep quiet now till I shut the door. [*Goes up*.] There is some noise outside, a high, vexing noise, so that I can't

be listening to myself. [*Shuts door.*] Why can't they be quiet, why can't they be quiet? [BLIND MAN *tries to get away.*] Ah! you would get away, would you? [*Follows BLIND MAN and brings him back.*] Lie there, lie there. [*Throws him down.* BLIND MAN *again attempts to go.*] No, you won't get away. Lie there till the kings come. I'll tell them all about you. I will tell it all. How you sit warming yourself, when you have made me light a fire of sticks, while I sit blowing it with my mouth. Do you not always make me take the windy side of the bush when it blows, and the rainy side when it rains?

BLIND MAN. Oh, good Fool, listen to me. Think of the care I have taken of you. I have brought you to many a warm hearth,

where there was a good welcome for you, but you would not stay there; you were always wandering about.

FOOL. The last time you brought me in, it was not I who wandered away, but you that got put out because you took the crubeen out of the pot when nobody was looking. Keep quiet now.

CUCHULAIN [*rushing in*]. Witchcraft! There is no witchcraft on the earth, or among the witches of the air, that these hands cannot break.

FOOL. Listen to me, Cuchulain. I left him turning the fowl at the fire. He ate it all, though I had stolen it. He left me nothing but the feathers.

CUCHULAIN. Fill me a horn of ale.

BLIND MAN. I gave him what he likes best. You do not know how vain this fool is. He likes nothing so well as a feather. [CUCHULAIN goes up to big door and looks out while BLIND MAN speaks.]

FOOL. He left me nothing but the bones and feathers. Nothing but the feathers, though I had stolen it.

CUCHULAIN [*turning*]. Fill me that horn. [FOOL brings horn.] Quarrels here too. [*Drinks and hands horn to FOOL.*] What is there between you two that is worth a quarrel? Out with it.

BLIND MAN. Where would he be but for me? I must be always thinking — thinking to get food for the two of us, and when we've got it, if the moon is at the full or the

tide on the turn, he'll leave the rabbit in the snare till it is full of maggots, or let the trout slip back through his hands into the stream.

[FOOL *has begun singing while BLIND MAN is speaking.*]

FOOL. When you were an acorn on the tree-top,

Then was I an eagle cock;

Now that you are a withered old block,

Still am I an eagle cock.

BLIND MAN. Listen to him now. That's the sort of talk I have to put up with day out, day in. [*The FOOL is putting the feathers of the hen into his hair. CUCHULAIN takes a handful of feathers and begins to wipe the blood from his sword with them.*]

FOOL. He has taken my feathers to wipe

his sword. It is blood that he is wiping from his sword. [CUCHULAIN *goes up to big door and throws feathers away.*]

CUCHULAIN. They are standing about his body. They will not awaken him, for all his witchcraft.

BLIND MAN. It is that young champion that he has killed. He that came out of Aoife's country.

CUCHULAIN. He thought to have saved himself with witchcraft.

FOOL. That Blind Man there said he would kill you. He came from Aoife's country to kill you. That Blind Man said they had taught him every kind of weapon that he might do it. But I always knew that you would kill him.

CUCHULAIN. You knew him then?

BLIND MAN. I saw him when I had my eyes in Aoife's country.

CUCHULAIN. You were in Aoife's country?

BLIND MAN. I knew him and his mother there.

CUCHULAIN. He was about to speak of her when he died.

BLIND MAN. He was a queen's son.

CUCHULAIN [*rushing at and seizing* BLIND MAN]. What queen, what queen? Was it Scathach? There were many queens. All the rulers there were queens.

BLIND MAN. No, not Scathach.

CUCHULAIN. It was Uathach, then? Speak! speak!

BLIND MAN. I cannot speak. You are clutching me too tightly. [CUCHULAIN *lets*

him go.] I cannot remember who it was. I am not certain. It was some queen.

FOOL. He said a little while ago that the young man was Aoife's son.

CUCHULAIN. She! No, no. She had no son when I was there.

FOOL. That blind man there said that she owned him for her son.

CUCHULAIN. I had rather he had been some other woman's son. What father had he? A soldier out of Alba? She was an amorous woman, — a proud, pale, amorous woman.

BLIND MAN. None knew whose son he was.

CUCHULAIN. None knew! Did you know, old listener at doors?

BLIND MAN. No, no. I knew nothing.

FOOL. He said awhile ago that he heard

Aoife boast that she'd never but the one lover, and he the only man that had overcome her in battle. [*A pause.*]

BLIND MAN. Somebody is trembling, Fool. The bench is shaking. Why are you trembling? Is Cuchulain going to hurt us? It was not I who told you, Cuchulain.

FOOL. It is Cuchulain who is trembling. It is he who is shaking the bench.

BLIND MAN. It is his own son that he has killed.

CUCHULAIN. 'Twas they that did it, the
pale, windy people.
Where? where? where? My sword against
the thunder,
But no, for they have always been my friends;
And though they love to blow a smoking coal

Till it's all flame, the wars they blow aflame
Are full of glory and heart-uplifting pride,
And not like this. The wars they love awaken
Old fingers and the sleepy strings of harps.

Who did it, then? Are you afraid? Speak out!
For I have put you under my protection,
And will reward you well. Dubthach the Chafer.
He had an old grudge. No, for he is with
Maeve.

Laegaire did it! Why do you not speak?
What is this house? [*Pause.*] Now I re-
member all.

[*Comes before CONCHOBAR'S chair and strikes
out with his sword.*]

'Twas you who did it — you who sat up there,
With your old rod of kingship, like a magpie,
Nursing a stolen spoon. No, not a magpie.

A maggot that is eating up the earth!

Yes, but a magpie, for he's flown away.

Where did he fly to?

BLIND MAN. He is outside the door.

CUCHULAIN. Outside the door?

BLIND MAN. Between the door and the sea.

CUCHULAIN. Conchobar, Conchobar! the
sword into your heart.

*[He rushes out. Pause. FOOL creeps up to
big door and looks after him.]*

FOOL. He is going up to King Conchobar.
They are all about the young man. No, no.
He is standing still. There is a great wave
going to break, and he is looking at it. Ah!
now he is running down to the sea, but he is
holding up his sword as if he were going into
a fight. *[Pause.]* Well struck! well struck!

BLIND MAN. What is he doing now?

FOOL. Oh! he is fighting the waves!

BLIND MAN. He sees King Conchobar's crown on every one of them.

FOOL. There, he has struck at a big one! He has struck the crown off it. He has made the foam fly. There again, another big one!

BLIND MAN. Where are the kings? What are the kings doing?

FOOL. They are shouting and running down to the shore, and the people are running out of the houses. They are all running.

BLIND MAN. You say they are running out of the houses. There will be nobody left in the houses. Listen, Fool.

FOOL. There, he is down. He is up again. He is going out into the deep water. There

is a big wave. It has gone over him. I cannot see him now. He has killed kings and giants, but the waves have mastered him, the waves have mastered him.

BLIND MAN. Come here, Fool!

FOOL. The waves have mastered him!

BLIND MAN. Come here, I say.

FOOL [*coming towards him, but looking backwards towards the door*]. What is it?

BLIND MAN. There will be nobody in the houses. Come this way; come quickly. The ovens will be full. We will put our hands into the ovens. [*They go out.*]

CURTAIN

THE KING'S THRESHOLD

TO FRANK FAY

*Because of his beautiful speaking and
acting in the part of SEANCHAN.*

PERSONS

KING GUAIRE

SEANCHAN'S PUPILS

THE MAYOR OF KINVARA

TWO CRIPPLES

SEANCHAN (pronounced *Shanahan*).

THE LORD CHAMBERLAIN

A MONK

TWO COURT LADIES

A SOLDIER

TWO PRINCESSES

FEDELM

THE KING'S THRESHOLD

SCENE. *Steps before the palace of KING
GUAIRE at Gort. A table in front of steps
at one side with food on it. SEANCHAN
lying on steps. PUPILS before steps. KING
on the upper step before a curtained door.*

KING. I welcome you that have the
mastery

Of the two kinds of Music: the one kind
Being like a woman, the other like a man.
Both you that understand stringed instru-
ments,

And how to mingle words and notes together
So artfully, that all the Art's but Speech

Delighted with its own music; and you that
carry

The long twisted horn, and understand
The heady notes that, being without words,
Can hurry beyond Time and Fate and Change.
For the high angels that drive the horse of
Time —

The golden one by day, by night the silver —
Are not more welcome to one that loves the
world

For some fair woman's sake.

I have called you hither
To save the life of your great master, Seanchan,
For all day long it has flamed up or flickered
To the fast cooling hearth.

OLDEST PUPIL. When did he sicken?
Is it a fever that is wasting him?

KING. No fever or sickness. He has
chosen death :

Refusing to eat or drink, that he may bring
Disgrace upon me ; for there is a custom,
An old and foolish custom, that if a man
Be wronged, or think that he is wronged, and
starve

Upon another's threshold till he die,
The common people, for all time to come,
Will raise a heavy cry against that threshold,
Even though it be the King's.

OLDEST PUPIL. My head whirls round ;
I do not know what I am to think or say.
I owe you all obedience, and yet
How can I give it when the man I have loved
More than all others thinks that he is
wronged

So bitterly, that he will starve and die
Rather than bear it? Is there any man
Would throw his life away for a light issue?

KING. It is but fitting that you take his side
'Till you have heard how light the issue is
That has put us by the ears. Three days ago
I yielded to the outcry of my courtiers —
Bishops, Soldiers, and Makers of the Law —
Who long had thought it against their
dignity

For a mere man of words to sit amongst them
At my own table. When the meal was spread,
I ordered Seanchan to a lower table;
And when he pleaded for the poets' right,
Established at the establishment of the world,
I said that I was King, and that all rights
Had their original fountain in some King,

And that it was the men who ruled the world,
And not the men who sang to it, who should
sit

Where there was the most honour. My
courtiers —

Bishops, Soldiers, and Makers of the Law —
Shouted approval; and amid that noise
Seanchan went out, and from that hour,
Altho' there is good food and drink beside
him,

Has eaten nothing.

OLDEST PUPIL. I breathe again.
You have taken a great burden from my
mind,
For that old custom is not worth dying for.

KING. Persuade him to eat or drink. 'Till
yesterday

I thought that hunger and weakness had been
enough;

But finding them too trifling and too light
To hold his mouth from biting at the grave,
I called you hither, and all my hope's in
you,

And certain of his neighbours and good friends
That I have sent for. While he is lying there
Perishing, my good name in the world
Is perishing also. I cannot give way,
Because I am King. Because if I gave way,
My Nobles would call me a weakling, and it
may be

The very throne be shaken.

OLDEST PUPIL. I will persuade him.
Your words had been enough persuasion,
King;

But being lost in sleep or reverie,
He cannot hear them.

KING. Make him eat or drink.

Nor is it all because of my good name
I'd have him do it, for he is a man
That might well hit the fancy of a king
Banished out of his country, or a woman's,
Or any other's that can judge a man
For what he is. But I that sit a throne,
And take my measure from the needs of the
State,
Call his wild thought that overruns the
measure,
Making words more than deeds, and his proud
will,
That would unsettle all, most mischievous,
And he himself a most mischievous man.

*[The KING has gone up the steps; he turns
to go, and then returns again.]*

Promise a house with grass and tillage
land,

An annual payment, jewels and silken ware,
Or anything but that old right of the poets.

[He goes into palace.]

OLDEST PUPIL. The King did wrong to
abrogate our right;

But Seanchan, who talks of dying for it,
Talks foolishly. Look at us, Seanchan;
Waken out of your dream and look at us,
Who have ridden under the moon and all the
day,

Until the moon has all but come again,
That we might be beside you.

SEANCHAN *[half turning round, leaning on*

his elbow, and speaking as if in a dream].

I was but now

In Almhuin, in a great high-raftered house,
With Finn and Osgar. Odours of roast flesh
Rose round me, and I saw the roasting-spits;
And then the dream was broken, and I saw
Grania dividing salmon by a stream;
And then I was awakened by your voice.

OLDEST PUPIL. Hunger has made you
dream of roasting flesh;

And though I all but weep to think of it,
The hunger of the crane, that starves himself
At the full moon because he is afraid
Of his own shadow and the glittering water,
Seems to me little more fantastical
Than this of yours.

SEANCHAN. Why, that's the very truth.

It is as though the moon changed every
thing —

Myself and all that I can hear and see;
For when the heavy body has grown weak,
There's nothing that can tether the wild mind
That, being moonstruck and fantastical,
Goes where it fancies. I had even thought
I knew your voice and face, but now the
words

Are so unlikely that I needs must ask
Who is it that bids me put my hunger by.

OLDEST PUPIL. I am your oldest pupil,
Seanchan;

The one that has been with you many years —
So many, that you said at Candlemas
That I had almost done with school, and knew
All but all that poets understand.

SEANCHAN. My oldest pupil? No, that
cannot be,

For it is some one of the courtly crowds
That have been round about me from sun-
rise,

And I am tricked by dreams; but I'll refute
them.

At Candlemas I bid that pupil tell me
Why poetry is honoured, wishing to know
If he had any weighty argument
For distant countries and strange, churlish
Kings.

What did he answer?

OLDEST PUPIL. I said the poets hung
Images of the life that was in Eden
About the child-bed of the world, that it,
Looking upon those images, might bear

Triumphant children. But why must I stand
here,

Repeating an old lesson, while you starve?

SEANCHAN. Tell on, for I begin to know the
voice.

What evil thing will come upon the world
If the Arts perish?

OLDEST PUPIL. If the Arts should perish,
The world that lacked them would be like a
woman,

That looking on the cloven lips of a hare,
Brings forth a hare-lipped child.

SEANCHAN. But that's not all:
For when I asked you how a man should
guard

Those images, you had an answer also,
If you're the man that you have claimed to be,

Comparing them to venerable things

God gave to men before he gave them wheat.

OLDEST PUPIL. I answered — and the word
was half your own —

That he should guard them as the men of
Dea

Guard their four treasures, as the Grail King
guards

His holy cup, or the pale, righteous horse

The jewel that is underneath his horn,

Pouring out life for it as one pours out

Sweet heady wine. . . . But now I under-
stand;

You would refute me out of my own mouth ;

And yet a place at table, near the King,

Is nothing of great moment, Seanchan.

How does so light a thing touch poetry ?

[SEANCHAN *is now sitting up. He still looks dreamily in front of him.*]

SEANCHAN. At Candlemas you called this
poetry

One of the fragile, mighty things of God,
That die at an insult.

OLDEST PUPIL [*to other PUPILS*]. Give
me some true answer,
For on that day we spoke about the
Court,

And said that all that was insulted there
The world insulted, for the Courtly life,
Being the first comely child of the world,
Is the world's model. How shall I answer
him?

Can you not give me some true argument?

I will not tempt him with a lying one.

YOUNGEST PUPIL. O, tell him that the
lovers of his music

Have need of him.

SEANCHAN. But I am labouring

For some that shall be born in the nick o' time
And find sweet nurture, that they may have
voices,

Even in anger, like the strings of harps;
For how could they be born to majesty
If I had never made the golden cradle?

YOUNGEST PUPIL [*throwing himself at*
SEANCHAN'S *feet*]. Why did you take
me from my father's fields?

If you would leave me now, what shall I love?
Where shall I go? What shall I set my hand
to?

And why have you put music in my ears,

If you would send me to the clattering houses?
I will throw down the trumpet and the harp,
For how could I sing verses or make music
With none to praise me, and a broken heart?

SEANCHAN. What was it that the poets
promised you,

If it was not their sorrow? Do not speak.
Have I not opened school on these bare steps,
And are not you the youngest of my scholars?
And I would have all know that when all falls
In ruin, poetry calls out in joy,
Being the scattering hand, the bursting pod,
The victim's joy among the holy flame,
God's laughter at the shattering of the world.
And now that joy laughs out, and weeps and
burns
On these bare steps.

YOUNGEST PUPIL. O master, do not die!

OLDEST PUPIL. Trouble him with no use-
less argument.

Be silent! There is nothing we can do
Except find out the King and kneel to him,
And beg our ancient right.

For here are some
To say whatever we could say and more,
And fare as badly. Come, boy, that is no use.

[*Raises YOUNGEST PUPIL.*]

If it seem well that we beseech the King,
Lay down your harps and trumpets on the
stones

In silence, and come with me silently.

Come with slow footfalls, and bow all your
heads,

For a bowed head becomes a mourner best.

[*They lay harps and trumpets down one by one, and then go out very solemnly and slowly, following one another. Enter MAYOR, TWO CRIPPLES, and an old SERVANT. The MAYOR, who has an ogham stick in his hand, crosses. BRIAN takes food out of basket. The CRIPPLES are interested in the basket.*]

MAYOR [*as he crosses*]. "Chief Poet,"

"Ireland," "Townsmen," "grazing land,"

Those are the words I have to keep in mind —

"Chief Poet," "Ireland," "Townsmen,"

"grazing land."

I have the words. They are all upon the ogham.

But what's their order?

FIRST CRIPPLE.

The King were

rightly served

If Seanchan drove his good luck away.

What's there about a king, that's in the world

From birth to burial, like another man,

That he should change old customs, that were

in it

As long as ever the world has been a world?

SECOND CRIPPLE. If I were king I would

not meddle with him,

For there is something queer about a poet.

I knew of one that would be making rhyme

Under a thorn at crossing of three roads.

He was as ragged as ourselves, and yet

He was no sooner dead than every thorn tree

From Inchy to Kiltartan withered away.

FIRST CRIPPLE. The King is but a fool!

MAYOR. I am getting ready.

FIRST CRIPPLE. A poet has power from
beyond the world,

That he may set our thoughts upon old times,
And lucky queens and little holy fish
That rise up every seventh year ——

MAYOR. Hush ! hush !

FIRST CRIPPLE. To cure the crippled.

MAYOR. I am half ready now.

BRIAN. There's not a mischief I'd begrudge
the King

If it were any other ——

MAYOR. Hush ! I am ready.

BRIAN. That died to get it. I have brought
out the food,

And if my master will not eat of it,
I'll home and get provision for his wake,

For that's no great way off. Well, have your
say,

But don't be long about it.

MAYOR [*going close to SEANCHAN*].

Chief Poet of Ireland,
I am the Mayor of your own town Kinvara,
And I am come to tell you that the news
Of this great trouble with the King of Gort
Has plunged us in deep sorrow—part for you,
Our honoured townsman, part for our good
town.

[*Begins to hesitate; scratching his head.*]

But what comes now? Something about the
King.

BRIAN. Get on! get on! The food is ready
now.

MAYOR. Don't hurry me.

FIRST CRIPPLE. Give us a taste of it.
He'll not begrudge it.

SECOND CRIPPLE. Let them that have their
limbs
Starve if they will. We have to keep in mind
The stomach God has left to us.

MAYOR. Hush! I have it!
The King was said to be most friendly to us,
And we have reason, as you'll recollect,
For thinking that he was about to give
Those grazing lands inland we so much need,
Being pinched between the water and the
stones.
Our mowers mow with knives between the
stones;
The sea washes the meadows. You know well
We have asked nothing but what's reasonable.

SEANCHAN. Reason in plenty. Yellowy
white hair,

A hollow face, and not too many teeth.

How comes it he has been so long in the world

And not found Reason out?

[While saying this, he has turned half round.

He hardly looks at the MAYOR.]

BRIAN *[trying to pull MAYOR away].*

What good is there

In telling him what he has heard all day!

I will set food before him.

MAYOR *[shoving BRIAN away].* Don't
hurry me!

It's small respect you're showing to the town!

Get farther off! *[To SEANCHAN.]* We would

not have you think,

Weighty as these considerations are,

That they have been as weighty in our minds
As our desire that one we take much pride in,
A man that's been an honour to our town,
Should live and prosper ; therefore we beseech
you

To give way in a matter of no moment,
A matter of mere sentiment — a trifle —
That we may always keep our pride in you.

*[He finishes this speech with a pompous air,
motions to BRIAN to bring the food to SEAN-
CHAN, and sits on seat.]*

BRIAN. Master, master, eat this ! It's not
king's food,
That's cooked for everybody and nobody.
Here's barley bread out of your father's oven,
And dulse from Duras. Here is the dulse,
your honour ;

It's wholesome, and has the good taste of the sea.

[Takes dulse in one hand and bread in other and presses them into SEANCHAN'S hands. SEANCHAN shows by his movement his different feeling to BRIAN.]

FIRST CRIPPLE. He has taken it, and there'll be nothing left !

SECOND CRIPPLE. Nothing at all ; he wanted his own sort.

What's honey to a cat, corn to a dog,
Or a green apple to a ghost in a church-yard ?

SEANCHAN *[pressing food back into BRIAN'S hands]*. Eat it yourself, for you have come a journey,

And it may be have eaten nothing on the way.

BRIAN. How could I eat it, and your honour
starving!

It is your father sends it, and he cried
Because the stiffness that is in his bones
Prevented him from coming, and bid me tell
you

That he is old, that he has need of you,
And that the people will be pointing at him,
And he not able to lift up his head,
If you should turn the King's favour away;
And he adds to it, that he cared you well,
And you in your young age, and that it's right
That you should care him now.

SEANCHAN [*who is now interested*]. And
is that all?

What did my mother say?

BRIAN. She gave no message;

For when they told her you were resolved to
starve,

Or get again the ancient right of the poets,

She said: "No message can do any good.

He will not send the answer that you want.

We cannot change him." And she went
indoors,

Lay down upon the bed, and turned her face

Out of the light. And thereupon your
father

Said: "Tell him that his mother sends no
message,

Albeit broken down and miserable."

[*A pause.*]

Here is a pigeon's egg from Duras, and these
others

Were laid by your own hens.

SEANCHAN. She has sent no message.
Our mothers know us; they know us to the
bone.

They knew us before birth, and that is why
They know us even better than the sweet-
hearts

Upon whose breasts we have lain.

Go quickly! Go
And tell them that my mother was in the
right.

There is no answer. Go and tell them that.
Go tell them that she knew me.

MAYOR. What is he saying?
I never understood a poet's talk
More than the baa of a sheep!

[*Comes over from seat. SEANCHAN turns
away.*]

You have not heard,
It may be, having been so much away,
How many of the cattle died last winter
From lacking grass, and that there was much
sickness

Because the poor have nothing but salt fish
To live on through the winter?

BRIAN. Get away,
And leave the place to me ! It's my turn now,
For your sack's empty !

MAYOR. Is it get away!

Is that the way I'm to be spoken to!

Am I not Mayor? Amn't I authority?

Amn't I in the King's place? Answer me
that!

BRIAN. Then show the people what a king
is like:

Pull down old merings and root custom up,
Whitewash the dung-hills, fatten hogs and
geese,

Hang your gold chain about an ass's neck,
And burn the blessed thorn trees out of the
fields,

And drive what's comely away !

MAYOR. Holy Saint Coleman !

FIRST CRIPPLE. Fine talk ! fine talk !

What else does the King do ?

He fattens hogs and drives the poet away !

SECOND CRIPPLE. He starves the song-
maker !

FIRST CRIPPLE. He fattens geese !

MAYOR. How dare you take his name into
your mouth !

How dare you lift your voice against the King !

What would we be without him ?

BRIAN. Why do you praise him ?

I will have nobody speak well of him,

Or any other king that robs my master.

MAYOR. And had he not the right to ? and
the right

To strike your master's head off, being the
King,

Or yours or mine ? I say, "Long live the King !"

Because he does not take our heads from us.

Call out "Long life to him !"

BRIAN. Call out for him !

[Speaking at same time with MAYOR.]

There's nobody will call out for him,

But the smiths will turn their anvils,

The millers turn their wheels,

The farmers turn their churns,

The witches turn their thumbs,
Till he be broken and splintered into pieces.

MAYOR [*at same time with BRIAN*]. He
might, if he'd a mind to it,
Be digging out our tongues,
Or dragging out our hair,
Or bleaching us like calves,
Or weaning us like lambs,
But for the kindness and the softness that is
in him. [*They gasp for breath.*]

FIRST CRIPPLE. I'll curse him till I drop!
[*Speaking at same time as SECOND CRIPPLE
and MAYOR and BRIAN, who have begun
again.*]

The curse of the poor be upon him,
The curse of the widows upon him,
The curse of the children upon him,

The curse of the bishops upon him,
Until he be as rotten as an old mushroom !

SECOND CRIPPLE [*speaking at same time*
as FIRST CRIPPLE and MAYOR and BRIAN].

The curse of wrinkles be upon him !
Wrinkles where his eyes are,
Wrinkles where his nose is,
Wrinkles where his mouth is,
And a little old devil looking out of every
wrinkle !

BRIAN [*speaking at same time with MAYOR*
and CRIPPLES]. Nobody'll call for him,
And nobody will sing for him,
And nobody will hunt for him,
And nobody will fish for him,
And nobody will pray for him,
But ever and always curse him and abuse him.

MAYOR [*speaking at same time with*
CRIPPLE *and* BRIAN]. What good is in
a poet,

Has he money in a stocking,

Or cider in the cellar,

Or fitches in the chimney,

Or anything anywhere but his own idleness?

[BRIAN *seizes* MAYOR.]

MAYOR. Help! help! Am I not authority?

BRIAN. That's how I'll shout for the
King!

MAYOR. Help! help! Am I not in the
King's place?

BRIAN. I'll teach him to be kind to the
poor!

MAYOR. Help! help! Wait till we are in
Kinvara!

FIRST CRIPPLE [*beating MAYOR on the legs with crutch*]. I'll shake the royalty out of his legs!

SECOND CRIPPLE [*burying his nails in MAYOR'S face*]. I'll scramble the ermine out of his skin!

Enter CHAMBERLAIN

[*Comes down steps, shouting, "Silence! silence! silence!"*]

CHAMBERLAIN. How dare you make this uproar at the doors,
Deafening the very greatest in the land,
As if the farmyards and the rookeries
Had all been emptied!

FIRST CRIPPLE. It is the Chamberlain.

[CRIPPLES *go out.*]

CHAMBERLAIN. Pick up the litter there, and
get you gone!

Be quick about it! Have you no respect
For this worn stair, this all but sacred door,
Where suppliants and tributary kings
Have passed, and the world's glory knelt in
silence?

Have you no reverence for what all other
men

Hold honourable?

BRIAN. If I speak my mind,
I'd say the King would have his luck again
If he would let my master have his rights.

CHAMBERLAIN. Pick up your litter! Take
your noise away!

Make haste, and get the clapper from the bell!

BRIAN [*putting last of food into basket*].

What do the great and powerful care for rights
That have no armies!

[CHAMBERLAIN *begins shoving them out with
his staff.*]

MAYOR. My lord, I am not to blame.
I'm the King's man, and they attacked me
for it.

BRIAN. We have our prayers, our curses
and our prayers,
And we can give a great name or a bad one.

[MAYOR *is shoving BRIAN out before him
with one hand. He keeps his face to
CHAMBERLAIN, and keeps bowing. The
CHAMBERLAIN shoves him with his staff.*]

MAYOR. We could not make the poet eat,
my lord.

[*Chamberlain shoves him with staff.*]

Much honoured [*is shoved again.*] — honoured
to speak with you, my lord;
But when the intellect is out, my lord,
Nobody but a woman's any good.

[*Same business for Chamberlain.*]

Much honoured, my lord, much honoured,
much honoured! [*Exit R. with BRIAN.*]

[*All through this scene, from the outset of the quarrel, SEANCHAN has kept his face turned away, or hidden in his cloak. While the CHAMBERLAIN has been speaking, the SOLDIER and the MONK have come out of the palace. The MONK stands on top of steps at one side, SOLDIER a little down steps at the other side, COURT LADIES seen at opening in the palace curtain behind SOLDIER. CHAMBERLAIN is in the centre.*]

CHAMBERLAIN [*to SEANCHAN*]. Well, you
must be contented, for your work
Has roused the common sort against the King,
And stolen his authority. The State
Is like some ancient, orderly, and reverend
house,
Wherein the master being dead of a sudden,
The servants quarrel where they have a
mind to,
And pilfer here and there.

[*Pause, finding that SEANCHAN does not
answer.*]

How many days
Will you keep up this quarrel with the King,
And the King's nobles, and myself, and all,
Who'd gladly be your friends, if you would
let them? [*Going near to MONK.*]

If you would try, you might persuade him,
father.

I cannot make him answer me, and yet
If fitting hands would offer him the food,
He might accept it.

MONK. Certainly I will not.

I've made too many homilies, wherein
The wanton imagination of the poets
Has been condemned, to be his flatterer.
If pride and disobedience are unpunished,
Who will obey?

CHAMBERLAIN [*going to other side towards*
SOLDIER]. If you would speak to him,
You might not find persuasion difficult,
With all the devils of hunger helping you.

SOLDIER. I will not interfere, for if he
starve

For being obstinate and stiff in the neck,
'Tis but good riddance.

CHAMBERLAIN. One of us must do it.
It might be, if you'd reason with him, ladies,
He would eat something, for I have a notion
That if he brought misfortune on the King,
Or the King's house, we'd be as little thought
of

As summer linen when the winter's come.

FIRST GIRL. But it would be the greater
compliment
If Peter'd do it.

SECOND GIRL. Reason with him, Peter.
Persuade him to eat; he's such a bag of
bones!

SOLDIER. I'll never trust a woman's word
again!

There's nobody that was so loud against him
When he was at the table; now the wind's
changed,

And you that could not bear his speech or his
silence,

Would have him there in his old place again;
I do believe you would, but I won't help you.

SECOND GIRL. Why will you be so hard
upon us, Peter?

You know we have turned the common sort
against us,

And he looks miserable.

FIRST GIRL. We cannot dance,
Because no harper will pluck a string for us.

SECOND GIRL. I cannot sleep with think-
ing of his face.

FIRST GIRL. And I love dancing more
than anything.

SECOND GIRL. Do not be hard on us; but
yesterday

A woman in the road threw stones at me.

You would not have me stoned?

FIRST GIRL. May I not dance?

SOLDIER. I will do nothing. You have
put him out,

And now that he is out — well, leave him out.

FIRST GIRL. Do it for my sake, Peter.

SECOND GIRL. And for mine.

*[Each girl as she speaks takes PETER'S hand
with one hand, stroking down his arm with
the other. While SECOND GIRL is strok-
ing his arm, FIRST GIRL lets go and
gives him the dish.]*

SOLDIER. Well, well; but not your way.

[To SEANCHAN.] Here's meat for you.

It has been carried from too good a table
For men like you, and I am offering it
Because these women have made a fool of me.

[*A pause.*]

You mean to starve? You will have none
of it?

I'll leave it there, where you can sniff the
savour.

Snuff it, old hedgehog, and unroll yourself!
But if I were the King, I'd make you do it
With wisps of lighted straw.

SEANCHAN. You have rightly named me.
I lie rolled up under the ragged thorns
That are upon the edge of those great waters
Where all things vanish away, and I have
heard

Murmurs that are the ending of all sound.

I am out of life; I am rolled up, and yet,
Hedgehog although I am, I'll not unroll
For you, King's dog! Go to the King, your
master.

Crouch down and wag your tail, for it may be
He has nothing now against you, and I
think

[The soldier has drawn his sword.]

The stripes of your last beating are all healed.

CHAMBERLAIN *[striking up sword]*. Put up
your sword, sir; put it up, I say!

The common sort would tear you into pieces
If you but touched him.

SOLDIER. If he's to be flattered,
Petted, cajoled, and dandled into humour,
We might as well have left him at the table.

[Goes to one side, sheathing sword.]

SEANCHAN. You must need keep your
patience yet awhile,
For I have some few mouthfuls of sweet air
To swallow before I have grown to be as civil
As any other dust.

CHAMBERLAIN. You wrong us, Seanchan.
There is none here but holds you in respect;
And if you'd only eat out of this dish,
The King would show how much he honours
you. *[Bowling and smiling.]*

Who could imagine you'd take to heart
Being put from the high table? I am certain
That you, if you will only think it over,
Will understand that it is men of law,
Leaders of the King's armies, and the like,
That should sit there.

SEANCHAN. Somebody has deceived you,

Or maybe it was your own eyes that lied,
In making it appear that I was driven
From the King's table. You have driven
away

The images of them that weave a dance
By the four rivers in the mountain garden.

CHAMBERLAIN. You mean we have driven
poetry away.

But that's not altogether true, for I,
As you should know, have written poetry.
And often when the table has been cleared,
And candles lighted, the King calls for me,
And I repeat it him. My poetry
Is not to be compared with yours; but still,
Where I am honoured, poetry is honoured
In some measure.

SEANCHAN. If you are a poet,

Cry out that the King's money would not
buy,

Nor the high circle consecrate his head,
If poets had never christened gold, and even
The moon's poor daughter, that most whey-
faced metal,

Precious; and cry out that none alive
Would ride among the arrows with high
heart,

Or scatter with an open hand, had not
Our heady craft commended wasteful virtues.
And when that story's finished, shake your
coat

Where little jewels gleam on it, and say,
A herdsman, sitting where the pigs had
trampled,

Made up a song about enchanted kings,

Who were so finely dressed, one fancied them
All fiery, and women by the churn
And children by the hearth caught up the song
And murmured it, until the tailors heard it.

CHAMBERLAIN. If you would but eat some-
thing you'd find out
That you have had these thoughts from lack
of food
For hunger makes us feverish.

SEANCHAN Cry aloud
That when we are driven out we come again
Like a great wind that runs out of the waste
To blow the tables flat; and thereupon
Lie down upon the threshold till the King
Restore to us the ancient right of the poets.

MONK. You cannot shake him. I will to
the King,

And offer him consolation in his trouble,
For that man there has set his teeth to die.
And being one that hates obedience,
Discipline, and orderliness of life,
I cannot mourn him.

FIRST GIRL. 'Twas you that stirred it
up.

You stirred it up that you might spoil our
dancing.

Why shouldn't we have dancing? We're
not in Lent.

Yet nobody will pipe or play to us;
And they will never do it if he die.
And that is why you are going.

MONK. What folly's this?

FIRST GIRL. Well, if you did not do it,
speak to him —

Use your authority; make him obey you.

What harm is there in dancing?

MONK.

Hush! begone!

Go to the fields and watch the hurley players,

Or any other place you have a mind to.

This is not woman's work.

FIRST GIRL.

Come! let's away!

We can do nothing here.

MONK. The pride of the poets!

Dancing, hurling, the country full of noise,

And King and Church neglected. Seanchan,

I'll take my leave, for you are perishing

Like all that let the wanton imagination

Carry them where it will, and it's not likely

I'll look upon your living face again.

SEANCHAN. Come nearer, nearer!

MONK.

Have you some last wish?

SEANCHAN. Stoop down, for I would whisper it in your ear.

Has that wild God of yours, that was so wild
When you'd but lately taken the King's pay,
Grown any tamer? He gave you all much
trouble.

MONK. Let go my habit!

SEANCHAN. Have you persuaded him
To chirp between two dishes, when the King
Sits down to table?

MONK. Let go my habit, sir!

[Crosses to centre of stage.]

SEANCHAN. And maybe he has learnt to
sing quite softly
Because loud singing would disturb the King,
Who is sitting drowsily among his friends
After the table has been cleared. Not yet!

[SEANCHAN *has been dragged some feet clinging to the MONK's habit.*]

SEANCHAN. You did not think that hands
so full of hunger
Could hold you tightly. They are not civil
yet.
I'd know if you have taught him to eat
bread
From the King's hand, and perch upon his
finger.
I think he perches on the King's strong hand.
But it may be that he is still too wild.
You must not weary in your work; a king
Is often weary, and he needs a God
To be a comfort to him.

[*The MONK plucks his habit away and goes into palace.* SEANCHAN *holds up his hand*

*as if a bird perched upon it. He pretends
to stroke the bird.]*

A little God,
With comfortable feathers, and bright eyes.

FIRST GIRL. There will be no more dancing
in our time,
For nobody will play the harp or the fiddle.
Let us away, for we cannot amend it,
And watch the hurley.

SECOND GIRL. Hush! he is looking at
us.

SEANCHAN. Yes, yes, go to the hurley, go
to the hurley,
Go to the hurley! Gather up your skirts —
Run quickly! You can remember many love
songs;
I know it by the light that's in your eyes —

But you'll forget them. You're fair to look
upon.

Your feet delight in dancing, and your
mouths

In the slow smiling that awakens love.

The mothers that have borne you mated
rightly,

For they had little ears as thirsty as your
ears

For many love songs. Go to the young
men.

Are not the ruddy flesh and the thin flanks
And the broad shoulders worthy of desire?

Go from me! Here is nothing for your
eyes.

But it is I that am singing you away —
Singing you to the young men.

[*The Two Young Princesses come out of palace. While he had been speaking, the Girls have shrunk back holding each other's hands.*]

FIRST GIRL.

Be quiet !

Look who is it has come out of the house.

Princesses, we are for the hurling field.

Will you come too ?

FIRST PRINCESS. We will go with you,
Aileen.

But we must have some words with Seanchan,
For we have come to make him eat and drink.

CHAMBERLAIN. I will hold out the dish and
cup for him

While you are speaking to him of his folly,
If you desire it, Princess.

[*He has taken dish and cup.*]

FIRST PRINCESS.

No, Finula

Will carry him the dish and I the cup.

We'll offer them ourselves.

[They take the cup and dish.]

FIRST GIRL.

They are so gracious;

The dear little Princesses are so gracious.

*[PRINCESS holds out her hand for SEANCHAN
to kiss it. He does not move.]*

Although she is holding out her hand to him,
He will not kiss it.

FIRST PRINCESS.

My father bids us say

That, though he cannot have you at his table,

You may ask any other thing you like

And he will give it you. We carry you

With our own hands a dish and cup of wine.

GIRL. O, look! he has taken it! He has
taken it!

The dear Princesses ! I have always said
That nobody could refuse them anything.

[SEANCHAN *takes the cup in one hand. In
the other he holds for a moment the hand
of the PRINCESS.*]

SEANCHAN. O long, soft fingers and pale
finger-tips,

Well worthy to be laid in a king's hand !

O, you have fair white hands, for it is cer-
tain

There is uncommon whiteness in these hands.
But there is something comes into my
mind,

Princess. A little while before your birth,
I saw your mother sitting by the road
In a high chair ; and when a leper passed,
She pointed him the way into the town.

He lifted up his hand and blessed her hand —
I saw it with my own eyes. Hold out your
hands;

I will find out if they are contaminated.

For it has come into my thoughts that maybe
The King has sent me food and drink by
hands

That are contaminated. I would see all your
hands.

You've eyes of dancers; but hold out your
hands,

For it may be there are none sound among
you.

[*The PRINCESSES have shrunk back in terror.*]

FIRST PRINCESS. He has called us lepers.

[*SOLDIER draws sword.*]

CHAMBERLAIN. He's out of his mind,

And does not know the meaning of what he said.

SEANCHAN [*standing up*]. There are no sound hands among you — no sound hands.

Away with you! away with all of you!

You are all lepers! There is leprosy

Among the plates and dishes that you have carried.

And wherefore have you brought me leper's wine?

[*He flings the contents of the cup in their faces.*]

There, there! I have given it to you again.

And now

Begone, or I will give my curse to you.

You have the leper's blessing, but you think

Maybe the bread will something lack in
savour

Unless you mix my curse into the dough.

[They go out to R., all. SEANCHAN is staggering in the middle of the stage.]

Where did I say the leprosy came from?

I said it came out of a leper's hand,

[Enter CRIPPLES.]

And that he walked the highway. But that's
folly,

For he was walking up there in the sky.

And there he is even now, with his white
hand

Thrust out of the blue air, and blessing
them

With leprosy.

CRIPPLE. He's pointing at the moon

That's coming out up yonder, and he calls it Leprous, because the daylight whitens it.

SEANCHAN. He's holding up his hand
above them all —

King, noblemen, princesses — blessing all.

Who could imagine he'd have so much
patience?

CRIPPLE [*clutching the CRIPPLE next him*].

Come out of this!

OTHER CRIPPLE [*pointing to food*]. If you
don't need it, sir,

May we not carry some of it away?

SEANCHAN. Who's speaking? Who are
you?

CRIPPLE. Come out of this!

OTHER CRIPPLE. Have pity on us, that
must beg our bread

From table to table throughout the entire
world,

And yet be hungry.

SEANCHAN [*intensely, to them*]. But why
were you born crooked?

What bad poet did your mothers listen
to

That you were born so crooked?

CRIPPLE.

Come away!

Maybe he's cursed the food, and it might kill
us.

OTHER CRIPPLE. Yes, better come away.

[*They go out.*]

SEANCHAN [*staggering, and speaking wearily*].

He has great strength

And great patience to hold his right hand
there,

Uplifted and not wavering about.

He is much stronger than I am, much stronger.

[*Sinks down on steps. Enter MAYOR and
FEDELM.*]

FEDELM [*her finger on her lips*]. Say
nothing! I will get him out of this
Before I have said a word of food and drink;
For while he is on this threshold and can
hear,

It may be, the voices that made mock of him,
He would not listen. I'd be alone with him.

[*MAYOR goes out. FEDELM goes to SEAN-
CHAN and kneels before him.*]

Seanchan! Seanchan!

[*He remains looking into the sky.*]

Can you not hear me, Seanchan?

It is myself.

[*He looks at her, dreamily at first, then takes her hand.*]

SEANCHAN. Is this your hand, Fedelm?
I have been looking at another hand
That is up yonder.

FEDERM. I have come for you.

SEANCHAN. Fedelm, I did not know that
you were here.

FEDERM. And can you not remember that
I promised
That I would come and take you home with
me

When I'd the harvest in? And now I've come,
And you must come away, and come on the
instant.

SEANCHAN. Yes, I will come. But is the
harvest in?

This air has got a summer taste in it.

FEDELM. But is not the wild middle of the
summer

A better time to marry? Come with me
now!

SEANCHAN [*seizing her by both wrists*].

Who taught you that? For it's a cer-
tainty,

Although I never knew it till last night,
That marriage, because it is the height of
life,

Can only be accomplished to the full
In the high days of the year. I lay awake:
There had come a frenzy into the light of the
stars,

And they were coming nearer, and I knew
All in a minute they were about to marry

Clods out upon the ploughlands, to beget
A mightier race than any that has been.
But some that are within there made a
noise,
And frightened them away.

FEDERM. Come with me now!
We have far to go, and daylight's running
out.

SEANCHAN. The stars had come so near me
that I caught
Their singing. It was praise of that great
race
That would be haughty, mirthful, and white-
bodied,
With a high head, and open hand, and how,
Laughing, it would take the mastery of the
world.

FEDERM. But you will tell me all about
their songs

When we're at home. You have need of rest
and care,

And I can give them you when we're at
home.

And therefore let us hurry, and get us home.

SEANCHAN. It's certain that there is some
trouble here,

Although it's gone out of my memory.

And I would get away from it. Give me
your help. *[Trying to rise.]*

But why are not my pupils here to help me?

Go, call my pupils, for I need their help.

FEDERM. Come with me now, and I will
send for them,

For I have a great room that's full of beds

I can make ready; and there is a smooth
lawn,

Where they can play at hurley and sing
poems

Under an apple tree.

SEANCHAN. I know that place:

An apple tree, and a smooth level lawn

Where the young men can sway their hurley
sticks. [Sings.]

The four rivers that run there,

Through well-mown level ground,

Have come out of a blessed well

That is all bound and wound

By the great roots of an apple,

And all the fowl of the air

Have gathered in the wide branches

And keep singing there.

[FEDELM, *troubled, has covered her eyes with
her hands.*]

FEDELM. No, there are not four rivers
and those rhymes

Praise Adam's paradise.

SEANCHAN. I can remember now,
It's out of a poem I made long ago
About the garden in the east of the world,
And how spirits in the images of birds
Crowd in the branches of old Adam's crab-
tree.

They come before me now, and dig in the
fruit

With so much gluttony, and are so drunk
With that harsh wholesome savour, that their
feathers

Are clinging one to another with the juice.

But you would lead me to some friendly place,
And I would go there quickly.

FEDELM [*helping him to rise*]. Come with
me.

[*He walks slowly, supported by her, till he
comes to table.*]

SEANCHAN. But why am I so weak?
Have I been ill?

Sweetheart, why is it that I am so weak?

[*Sinks on to seat.*]

FEDELM [*goes to table*]. I'll dip this piece
of bread into the wine,
For that will make you stronger for the
journey.

SEANCHAN. Yes, give me bread and wine;
that's what I want,
For it is hunger that is gnawing me.

[*He takes bread from FEDELM, hesitates, and then thrusts it back into her hand.*]

But, no; I must not eat it.

FEDELM.

Eat, Seanchan.

For if you do not eat it, you will die.

SEANCHAN. Why did you give me food?

Why did you come?

For had I not enough to fight against

Without your coming?

FEDELM. Eat this little crust,

Seanchan, if you have any love for me.

SEANCHAN. I must not eat it — but that's
beyond your wit.

Child! child! I must not eat it, though I
die.

FEDELM [*passionately*]. You do not know
what love is; for if you loved,

You would put every other thought away.

But you have never loved me.

SEANCHAN [*seizing her by the wrist*]. You,
a child,

Who have but seen a man out of the window,

Tell me that I know nothing about love,

And that I do not love you! Did I not say

There was a frenzy in the light of the stars

All through the livelong night, and that the
night

Was full of marriages? But that fight's over,

And all that's done with, and I have to die.

FEDELM [*throwing her arms about him*]. I
will not be put from you, although I
think

I had not grudged it you if some great lady,

If the King's daughter, had set out your bed.

I will not give you up to death ; no, no !

And are not these white arms and this soft
neck

Better than the brown earth ?

SEANCHAN [*struggling to disengage himself*]. Begone from me !

There is treachery in those arms and in that
voice.

They're all against me. Why do you linger
there ?

How long must I endure the sight of you ?

FEDELM. O, Seanchan ! Seanchan !

SEANCHAN [*rising*]. Go where you will,
So it be out of sight and out of mind.

I cast you from me like an old torn cap,

A broken shoe, a glove without a finger,

A crooked penny ; whatever is most worthless.

FEDELM [*bursts into tears*]. O, do not
drive me from you!

SEANCHAN [*takes her in his arms*]. What
did I say,

My dove of the woods? I was about to
curse you.

It was a frenzy. I'll unsay it all.

But you must go away.

FEDERM. Let me be near you.

I will obey like any married wife.

Let me but lie before your feet.

SEANCHAN. Come nearer. [*Kisses her.*]

If I had eaten when you bid me, sweetheart,

The kiss of multitudes in times to come

Had been the poorer.

Enter KING from house.

KING [*to FEDELM*]. Has he eaten yet?

FEDELM. No, King, and will not till you
have restored

The right of the poets.

KING [*coming down and standing before*

SEANCHAN]. Seanchan, you have refused

Everybody that I have sent, and now

I come to you myself; and I have come

To bid you put your pride as far away

As I have put my pride. I had your love

Not a great while ago, and now you have
planned

To put a voice by every cottage fire,

And in the night when no one sees who cries,

To cry against me till my throne has crum-
bled.

And yet if I give way I must offend

My courtiers and my nobles till they, too,

Strike at the crown. What would you have
of me?

SEANCHAN. When did the poets promise
safety, King?

KING. Seanchan, I bring you bread in
my own hands,
And bid you eat because of all these reasons,
And for this further reason, that I love
you.

[SEANCHAN *pushes bread away, with*
FEDELM'S *hand.*]

You have refused it, Seanchan?

SEANCHAN. We have refused it.

KING. I have been patient, though I am a
king,
And have the means to force you. But that's
ended,

And I am but a king, and you a subject.

Nobles and courtiers, bring the poets hither.

*[Enter COURTIERs with PUPILs, who have
halters round their necks.]*

For you can have your way. I that was
man,

With a man's heart, am now all king again,
Remembering that the seed I come of, though
A hundred kings have sown it and resown it,
Has neither trembled nor shrunk backward
yet

Because of the hard business of a king.

Speak to your master; beg your life of him;

Show him the halter that is round your necks.

If his heart's set upon it, he may die;

But you shall all die with him.

[Goes up steps.]

Beg your lives !

Begin, for you have little time to lose.

Begin it, you that are the oldest pupil.

OLDEST PUPIL. Die, Seanchan, and proclaim the right of the poets.

KING. Silence ! you are as crazy as your master.

But that young boy, that seems the youngest of you,

I'd have him speak. Kneel down before him, boy ;

Hold up your hands to him, that you may pluck

That milky coloured neck out of the noose.

YOUNGEST PUPIL [*going to SEANCHAN*].

Die, Seanchan, and proclaim the right of the poets.

OLDEST PUPIL. Gather the halters up into
your hands

And drive us where you will, for in all things,
But in our Art, we are obedient.

[*The KING comes slowly down steps.*]

KING. Kneel down, kneel down; he has
the greater power.

There is no power but has its root in his —

I understand it now. There is no power

But his that can withhold the crown or give
it,

Or make it reverent in the eyes of men,

And therefore I have laid it in his hands,

And I will do his will.

[*He puts the crown into SEANCHAN'S hands.*]

SEANCHAN [*who has been assisted to rise by
his PUPILS*]. O crown! O crown!

It is but right the hands that made the crown
In the old time should give it where they
 please.

O silver trumpets! Be you lifted up,
And cry to the great race that is to come.
Long-throated swans, amid the waves of
 Time,
Sing loudly, for beyond the wall of the world
It waits, and it may hear and come to us!

[*A trumpet blast.*]

DEIRDRE

PERSONS

MUSICIANS

FERGUS (*an old man*)

DARK-FACED MEN (*from oversea*)

NAISI (*a young king*)

DEIRDRE (*a young queen*)

CONCHUBAR (*an old king but still strong and vigorous. He is the high king of Uladh. His name is pronounced Conohar*)

DEIRDRE

SCENE. *A guesthouse in a wood. It is a rough house of timber and through the doors and windows one can see the boughs and leaves. There is a door to right and left and in the centre a part of the house is curtained off. The curtains are drawn. There is at one side a small table with a chessboard and chessmen upon it and a wine flagon and loaf of bread. The light is darkening towards evening. There are unlighted torches in brackets on the walls. At the other side of the room there is a brazier with a fire. Two women, with musical instruments be-*

side them, crouch about the brazier. They are comely women of about forty. Another woman, who carries a stringed instrument, enters hurriedly. She speaks at first standing in the doorway.

FIRST MUSICIAN. I have a story right, my wanderers,

That has so mixed with fable in our songs
That all seemed fabulous. We are come by
chance

Into King Conchubar's country, and this
house

Is an old guesthouse built for travellers
From the seashore to Conchubar's royal
house

And there are certain hills among these woods,
And there Queen Deirdre grew.

SECOND MUSICIAN. That famous queen,
Who has been wandering with her lover Naisi,
And none to friend but lovers and wild hearts?

FIRST MUSICIAN [*going nearer to the brazier*].
Some dozen years ago King Conchubar found
A house upon a hillside in this wood,
And there a comely child with an old witch
To nurse her, and there's nobody can say
If she were human or of those begot
By an invisible king of the air in a storm
On a king's daughter, or anything at all
Of who she was or why she was hidden there,
But that she'd too much beauty for good luck.
He went up thither daily till at last
She put on womanhood and he lost peace,
And Deirdre's tale began. The king was old;
A month or so before the marriage day

A young man, in the laughing scorn of his
youth,

Naisi, the Son of Usnach, climbed up there,
And having wooed, or as some say been wooed,
Carried her off.

SECOND MUSICIAN. The tale were well
enough
Had it a finish.

FIRST MUSICIAN. Hush! I have more to
tell.
But gather close that I may whisper it.
I speak of terrible, mysterious ends,
The secrets of a king.

SECOND MUSICIAN. There's none to hear.

FIRST MUSICIAN. I have been to Conchu-
bar's house and followed up
A crowd of servants going out and in

With loads upon their heads, embroideries
To hang upon the walls or new-mown rushes
To strew upon the floors, and came at length
To a great room.

SECOND MUSICIAN. Be silent, there are
steps!

[*Enter FERGUS, an old man, who moves
about from door to window excitedly
through what follows.*]

FERGUS. You are musicians, by these instruments,

And if as seems, for you are comely women,
You can praise love, you'll have the best of
luck,

For there'll be two before the night is in
That bargained for their love and paid for it
All that men value. You have but the time

To weigh a happy music with a sad,
To find what is most pleasing to a lover,
Before the Son of Usnach and his queen
Have passed this threshold.

FIRST MUSICIAN. Deirdre and her man.

FERGUS. I thought to find a message from
the king,

And ran to meet it. Is there no messenger
From Conchubar to Fergus, Son of Rogh?

I was to have found a message in this house.

FIRST MUSICIAN. Are Deirdre and her
lover tired of life?

FERGUS. You are not of this country or
you'd know

That they are in my charge, and all forgiven.

FIRST MUSICIAN. We have no country
but the roads of the world.

FERGUS. Then you should know that all
things change in the world
And hatred turns to love and love to hate,
And even kings forgive.

FIRST MUSICIAN. An old man's love
Who casts no second line is hard to cure;
His jealousy is like his love.

FERGUS. And that's but true.
You have learned something in your wander-
ings.

He was so hard to cure that the whole court,
But I alone, thought it impossible;
Yet after I had urged it at all seasons
I had my way and all's forgiven now;
And you shall speak the welcome and the joy
That I lack tongue for.

FIRST MUSICIAN. Yet old men are jealous.

FERGUS [*going to door*]. I am Conchubar's
near friend and that weighed somewhat,
And it was policy to pardon them.

The need of some young famous popular man
To lead the troops, the murmur of the crowd,
And his own natural impulse urged him to it.
They had been wandering half a dozen years.

FIRST MUSICIAN. And yet old men are
jealous.

FERGUS [*coming from door*]. Sing the more
sweetly

Because though age is arid as a bone
This man has flowered. I've need of music
too.

If this gray head would suffer no reproach,
I'd dance and sing — and dance till the hour
run out

Because I have accomplished this good deed.

FIRST MUSICIAN. Look there, there, at the
window; those dark men,

With murderous and outlandish-looking arms,
They've been about the house all day.

*[Dark-faced men with strange barbaric
dress and arms pass by the doors and win-
dows. They pass one by one and in
silence.]*

FERGUS *[looking after them]*. What are you?
Where do you come from, who is it sent you
here?

FIRST MUSICIAN. They will not answer you.

FERGUS. They do not hear.

FIRST MUSICIAN. Forgive my open speech,
but to these eyes

That have seen many lands they are such men

But I'll not hear.

FIRST MUSICIAN. It may be life or death.
There is a room in Conchubar's house and
there —

FERGUS. Be silent or I'll drive you from the
door.

There's many a one that would do more than
that,

And make it life or death in very truth
To slander the high king [*suddenly restraining*
himself and speaking gently]. He is my
friend.

I have his oath and I am well content.

I have known his mind as if it were my own
These many years, and there is none alive
Shall buzz against him; and I there to stop it.
I know myself, and him, and your wild thought

Fed on extravagant poetry, and lit
By such a dazzle of old fabulous tales
That common things are lost, and all that's
strange

Is true because 'twere pity if it were not.

[Going to the door again.]

Quick, quick! your instruments; they are
coming now,

I hear the hoofs a-clatter. Begin that song.

But what is it to be? I'd have them hear

A music foaming up out of the house

Like wine out of a cup. Come now, a verse

Of some old time not worth remembering

And all the lovelier because a bubble.

Begin, begin, of some old king and queen,

Of Lugaidh Redstripe or another; no, not
him,

He and his lady perished wretchedly.

MUSICIAN [*singing*]. Why is it Queen Edain
said

If I do but climb the stair?

FERGUS. Ah! that is better . . . they are
alighted now.

Shake all your cockcombs, children, these are
lovers! [FERGUS *goes out.*]

FIRST MUSICIAN. Why is it, Queen Edain
said:

If I do but climb the stair
To the tower overhead
When the winds are calling there
Or the gannets calling out
In waste places of the sky,
There's so much to think about
That I cry, that I cry?

SECOND MUSICIAN. But her goodman answered her :

Love would be a thing of naught
Had not all his limbs a stir
Born out of immoderate thought.
Were he anything by half,
Were his measure running dry,
Lovers, if they may not laugh,
Have to cry, have to cry.

[DEIRDRE, NAISI, and FERGUS, *who have been seen approaching the door, come in.*]

THE THREE MUSICIANS *together*. But is
Edain worth a song
Now the hunt begins anew.
Praise the beautiful and strong.
Praise the redness of the Yew.
Praise the blossoming apple stem.

[THEY turn away, seeing that DEIRDRE
and NAISI are too full of thought to
listen.]

But our silence had been wise.

What is all our praise to them,

That have one another's eyes?

(The sky outside is still bright so that the room is dim in the midst of a wood full of evening light, but gradually during what follows the light fades out of the sky; and except during a short time before the lighting of the torches, and at the end of all, the room is either dark amid light or light amid the darkness. The lighting and the character of the scenery, the straight trees, and the spaces of sky and mountain between them suggest isolation and silence.

The musicians almost throughout remain near the brazier, but show the effect upon their minds of what is happening by their movements and the expression of their faces.)

FERGUS. You are welcome, lady.

DEIRDRE. Conchubar has not come.
Were the peace honest he'd have come him-
self

To prove it so.

FERGUS. He is no more in love.
He will have come before the night is in,
But till that hour these birds out of the waste
Shall put his heart and mine into the music.
There's many a day that I have almost wept
To think that one so delicately made
Might never know the sweet and natural life

Of women born to that magnificence
Quiet and music, courtesy and peace.

DEIRDRE. I have found life obscure and
violent

And think it ever so; but none the less
I thank you for your kindness and thank
these
That put it into music.

FERGUS. Your house has been
The hole of the badger or the den of the fox,
But all that's finished and your days will pass
In some elaborate leisured court, where all
The wine of life was trodden long ago.

NAISI. If I were childish and had faith
in omens,
I'd rather not have lit on that old chess-board
At my home coming.

NAISI. If the tale is true,
When it was plain that they had been be-
trayed,
They moved the men and waited for the
end
As it were bed time and had so quiet minds

They hardly winked their eyes when the
sword flashed.

FERGUS. She never could have played so,
being a woman,
If she had not the cold sea-mew's blood in
her.

DEIRDRE. I have heard the ever-living
warn mankind,
By changing clouds, and casual accidents,
Or what seem so.

FERGUS. If there had been ill luck
In lighting on this chess-board of a sudden,
This flagon that stood on it when we came
Has made all right again, for it should mean
All wrongs forgiven, hospitality
For bitter memory, peace after war;
While that loaf there should add prosperity.

You are King Conchubar's guest, being in his house.

You speak as women do that sit alone,
Marking the ashes with a stick till they
Are in a dreamy terror. Being a queen,
You should have too calm thought to start
at shadows.

FERGUS. Come, let us look if there's a
messenger
From Conchubar's house. The trees are not
so close

Upon that side, and one can see the path,
Now here, now there, as the trees thin or
thicken

For half a mile or so.

NAISI. When those we love
Speak words unfitting to the ear of kings,

Kind ears are deaf.

FERGUS. Not half an hour ago
I had to threaten these that would have
 weighed
Some crazy phantasy of their own brain
Or gossip of the road with Conchubar's
 word.

If I had thought so little of mankind,
I never could have moved him to this
 pardon.

I have believed the best of every man,
And find that to believe it is enough
To make a bad man show him at his best
Or even a good man swing his lantern
 higher.

[NAISI and FERGUS go out. *The last words
are spoken as they go through the door.*

One can see them through part of what follows, either through door or window. They move about, talking or looking along the road towards Conchubar's house.]

FIRST MUSICIAN. If anything lies heavy on
your heart,

Speak freely of it, knowing it is certain
That you will never see my face again.

DEIRDRE. You've been in love?

FIRST MUSICIAN. If you would speak of
love,

Speak freely; there is nothing in the world
That has been friendly to us but the
kisses

That were upon our lips, and when we are
old,

Their memory will be all the life we have.

DEIRDRE. There was a man that loved me.

He was old.

I could not love him, now I can but fear.

He has made promises, and brought me
home,

But though I turn it over in my thoughts

I cannot tell if they are sound and wholesome

Or hackles on the hook.

FIRST MUSICIAN. I have heard he loved you
As some old miser loves the dragon stone
He hides among the cobwebs near the roof.

DEIRDRE. You mean that when a man who
has loved like that

Is after crossed, love drowns in its own flood
And that love drowned and floating is but
hate.

And that a king who hates, sleeps ill at night,

Till he has killed; and that, though the day
laugh,

We shall be dead at cockcrow.

FIRST MUSICIAN. You have not my thought.
When I lost one I loved distractedly,
I blamed my crafty rival and not him,
And fancied till my passion had run out
That could I carry him away with me
And tell him all my love, I'd keep him yet.

DEIRDRE. Ah! now I catch your meaning,
that this king
Will murder Naisi, and keep me alive.

FIRST MUSICIAN. 'Tis you that put that
meaning upon words
Spoken at random.

DEIRDRE. Wanderers like you,
Who have their wit alone to keep their lives,

Speak nothing that is bitter to the ear
At random. If they hint of it at all,
Their eyes and ears have gathered it so lately
That it is crying out in them for speech.

FIRST MUSICIAN. We have little that is certain.

DEIRDRE. Certain or not,
Speak it out quickly, I beseech you to it.
I never have met any of your kind
But that I gave them money, food, and fire.

FIRST MUSICIAN. There are strange, miracle working, wicked stones
Men tear out of the heart and the hot brain
Of Libyan dragons.

DEIRDRE. The hot Istian stone
And the cold stone of Fanes that have power
To stir even those at enmity to love.

FIRST MUSICIAN. They have so great an
influence if but sewn
In the embroideries that curtain in
The bridal bed.

DEIRDRE. O Mover of the stars,
That made this delicate house of ivory
And made my soul its mistress, keep it safe.

FIRST MUSICIAN. I have seen a bridal bed
so curtained in,
So decked for miracle, in Conchubar's house,
And learned that a bride is coming.

DEIRDRE. And I the bride?
Here is worse treachery than the sea-mew
suffered,
For she but died and mixed into the dust
Of her dear comrade; but I am to live
And lie in the one bed with him I hate.

Where is Naisi? I was not alone like this
When Conchubar first chose me for his
wife.

I cried in sleep or waking and he came,
But now there is worse need.

NAISI [*entering with FERGUS*]. Why have
you called?

I was but standing there, without the door.

DEIRDRE [*going to the other door*]. The horses
are still saddled; follow me,
And hurry to our ships, and get us gone.

NAISI [*stopping her, and partly speaking to
her, partly to FERGUS*]. There's nought
to fear; the king's forgiven all.

She has the heart of a wild bird that fears
The net of the fowler or the wicker cage,
And has been ever so. Although it's hard,

It is but needful that I stand against you,
And if I did not, you'd despise me for it,
As women do the husbands that they lead,
Whether for good or evil.

DEIRDRE. I have heard
Monstrous, terrible, mysterious things —
Magical horrors and the spells of wizards.

FERGUS. Why, that's no wonder; you have
been listening
To singers of the roads that gather up
The tales of the whole world, and when they
weary,
Imagine new, or lies about the living,
Because their brains are ever upon fire.

DEIRDRE. Is then the king that sends no
messenger
And leaves an empty house before a guest

So clear in all he does that no dim word
Can light us to a doubt?

FERGUS. However dim,
Speak it, for I have known King Conchubar
Better than my own heart, and I can quench
Whatever words have made you doubt him.

NAISI. No,

I cannot weigh the gossip of the roads
With a king's word, and were the end but
 death

I may not doubt him.

DEIRDRE. Naisi, I must speak.

FERGUS. Let us begone. This house is
no fit place,
Being full of doubt, Deirdre is right. [*To*
DEIRDRE] No, no,
Not by that door that opens on the path

That runs to the seashore, but this that leads
To Conchubar's house. We'll wait no mes-
senger,

But go to his well-lighted house and there,
Where the rich world runs up into a wick
And that burns steadily, because no wind
Can blow upon it, bring all doubts to an
end.

The table has been spread by this, the court
Has ridden from all sides to welcome you
To safety and to peace.

DEIRDRE. Safety and peace!

I had them when a child, but never since.

FERGUS. Men blame you that you have
 stirred a quarrel up
 That has brought death to many. I have
 poured

Water upon the fire ; but if you fly
A second time, the house is in a blaze
And all the screaming household can but
blame

The savage heart of beauty for it all ;
And Naisi that but helped to tar the wisp
Be but a hunted outlaw all his days

DEIRDRE. I will be blamed no more ;
there's but one way.

I'll spoil this beauty that brought misery
And houseless wandering on the man I
loved,
And so buy peace between him and the
king.

These wanderers will show me how to do it,
To clip my hair to baldness, blacken my
skin

With walnut juice, and tear my face with
briers.

Oh! that wild creatures of the woods had
torn

This body with their claws.

NAISI. What is your meaning?
What are you saying? That he loves you
still?

DEIRDRE. What ever were to happen to this
face

I'd be myself; and there's not any way
But this way to bring trouble to an end.

NAISI. Answer me — does King Conchu-
bar still love,
Does he still covet you?

DEIRDRE. Tell out the plot,
The plan, the network, all the treachery,

And of the bridal chamber and the bed,
The magical stones, the wizard's handiwork.

NAISI. Take care of Deirdre if I die in
this,
For she must never fall into his hands,
Whatever the cost.

DEIRDRE. Where would you go to, Naisi?

NAISI. I go to drag the truth from Con-
chubar,
Before his people, in the face of his army,
And if it be as black as you have made it,
To kill him there.

DEIRDRE. You never would return;
I'll never look upon your face again.
Oh, keep him, Fergus, do not let him go,
But hold him from it. You are both wise
and kind.

NAISI. When you were all but Conchubar's
wife, I took you.

He tried to kill me, and he would have done it
If I had been so near as I am now.

And now that you are mine, he has planned
to take you.

Should I be less than Conchubar, being a man?

[*Dark-faced MESSENGER comes into the
house.*]

MESSENGER. The supper is spread out and
Conchubar

Is waiting for his guests.

FERGUS. All's well again,
All's well, all's well, you cried your doubts
so loud

That I had almost doubted.

NAISI. I would have killed him,

And he the while but busy in his house,
For the more welcome.

DEIRDRE. The message is not finished.

FERGUS. Come quickly, Conchubar will
 laugh that I,
Although I held out boldly in my speech,
That I, even I —

DEIRDRE. Wait, wait he is not done.

FERGUS. That am so great a friend have
 doubted him.

MESSENGER. Deirdre, and Fergus, Son of
 Rogh, are summoned,
But not the traitor that bore off the queen.
It is enough that the king pardon her,
And call her to his table and his bed.

NAISI. So then it's treachery.

FERGUS. I'll not believe it.

NAISI. Tell Conchubar to meet me in some
place,

Where we can settle all with the grey edge.

MESSENGER. I have done my message; I
am Conchubar's man,

I take no message from a traitor's lips.

[He goes.]

NAISI. No, but you must, and I will have
you swear

To carry it unbroken.

[He follows MESSENGER out.]

FERGUS. It is but lies.

I know King Conchubar's mind, as it were
my own;

I'll learn the truth from him.

*[He is about to follow NAISI, but DEIRDRE
stops him.]*

DEIRDRE.

No, no, old man;

You thought the best and the worst came of it,

We listened to the counsel of the wise

And so turned fools. But ride and bring
your friends.

Go, and go quickly. Conchubar has not
seen me.

It may be that his passion is asleep

And that we may escape.

FERGUS.

But I'll go first,

And follow up that Libyan heel and send

Such words to Conchubar, that he may
know

At how great peril he lays hands upon you.

[NAISI enters.]

NAISI. The Libyan, knowing that a mes-
senger

Is safe from hands like mine, but turned and
mocked.

FERGUS. I'll call my friends, and call the
reaping hooks

And carry you in safety to the ships.

My name has still some power. I will protect,
Or if that is impossible, revenge.

[Goes out by other door.]

NAISI [*who is calm, like a man who has passed beyond life*]. The crib has fallen and the birds are in it.

There is not one of the great oaks about us
But shades a hundred men.

DEIRDRE. Let's out and die

Or break away if the chance favour us.

NAISI. They would but drag you from me,
stained with blood.

Their barbarous weapons would but mar that
beauty,

And I would have you die, as a queen should,
In a death chamber. You are in my charge.
We will wait here and when they come upon
us,

I'll hold them from the doors, and when that's
over,

Give you a cleanly death with this gray edge.

DEIRDRE. I will stay here, but you go out
and fight.

Our way of life has brought no friends to us,
And if we do not buy them, leaving it,
We shall be ever friendless.

NAISI. What do they say?

That Lugaidh Redstripe and his sweetheart sat
Before this chessboard, waiting for their end.

They knew that there was nothing that could
save them

And so played chess, as they had any night
For years, and waited for the stroke of
sword.

I never heard a death so out of reach
Of common hearts, a high and comely end.
What need have I, that gave up all for love,
To die like an old king out of a fable,
Fighting and passionate ! What need is there
For all that ostentation at my setting !
I have loved truly and betrayed no man ;
I need no lightning at the end, no beating
In a vain fury at the cage's door.

[*To MUSICIANS.*]

Had you been here when that man and his
queen

Played at so high a game, could you have
found

An ancient poem for the praise of it?

It should have set out plainly that those two,
Because no man and woman have loved better,
Might sit on there contentedly, and weigh
The joy comes after. I have heard the sea-
mew

Sat there, with all the colour in her cheeks,
As though she'd say: "There's nothing hap-
pening

But that a king and queen are playing chess."

DEIRDRE. He's in the right, but I have not
been born

Out of the cold sea. My veins are fiery —
Though I love better than that sea-born
queen,

I'll have as quiet fingers on the board.

Oh, singing women, set it down in a book

That love is all we need, even though it is

But the last drops we gather up like this,

And though the drops are all we have known
of life —

For we have been most friendless — praise
us for it,

And praise the double sunset, for nought's
lacking

But a good end to the long, cloudy day.

NAISI. Light torches there and drive the
shadows out

For day's red end comes up.

DEIRDRE. Make no sad music.

What is it but a king and queen at chess?

They need a music that can mix itself

Into imagination, but not break
The steady thinking that the hard game
needs.

THE THREE MUSICIANS.

Love is an immoderate thing
And can never be content,
Till it dip an ageing wing
Where some laughing element
Leaps, and Time's old lanthorn dims.
What's the merit in love play,
In the tumult of the limbs,
That dies out before 'tis day :
Heart on heart, or mouth on mouth,
All that mingling of our breath
When love longing is but drought
For the things come after death?

[During the last verses DEIRDRE puts down

*the chessmen and goes round and kneels
at NAISI'S feet.]*

DEIRDRE. I cannot go on playing like that
woman

That had but the cold blood of the sea in her
veins.

NAISI. It is your move. Take up your
man again.

DEIRDRE. Do you remember that first night
in the woods?

We lay all night on leaves, and looking up,
When the first gray of the dawn awoke the
birds,
Saw leaves above us. You thought that I
still slept,
And bending down to kiss me on the
eyes,

Found they were open. Bend and kiss me
now,

For it may be the last before our death.

And when that's over, we'll be different,

Imperishable things, — a cloud or a fire, —

And I know nothing but this body, nothing

But that old vehement, bewildering kiss.

[CONCHUBAR *comes to the door.*]

MUSICIAN. Children, beware!

NAISI [*laughing*]. He has taken up my
challenge.

Whether I am a ghost or living man

When day has broken, I'll forget the rest,

And say that there is kingly stuff in
him.

[*Turns to fetch spear and shield, and then
sees that CONCHUBAR has gone.*]

DEIRDRE. He came to spy upon us, not to fight.

NAISI. A prudent hunter, therefore, but no king.

He'd find if what has fallen in the pit
Were worth the hunting but has come too
near;

And I turn hunter. You're not man, but beast.
Go scurry in the bushes, now, beast, beast,
For now it's topsy-turvy, I upon you.

[*He rushes out after CONCHUBAR. The house is now dark but for the light of the torches and a faint evening light in the sky.*]

DEIRDRE. You have a knife there, thrust into your girdle;

I'd have you give it me.

MUSICIAN. No, but I dare not.

DEIRDRE. No, but you must.

MUSICIAN. If harm should come to you,
They'd know I gave it.

DEIRDRE [*snatching knife*]. There is no
mark on this
To make it different from any other
Out of a common forge.

[*Goes to the door and looks out.*]

MUSICIAN. You have taken it,
I did not give it you; but there are times
When such a thing is all the friend one has.

DEIRDRE. The leaves hide all, and there's
no way to find
What path to follow. Why is there no sound?

[*She goes from door to window.*]

MUSICIAN. Where would you go?

DEIRDRE. To strike a blow for Naisi
If Conchubar call the Libyans to his aid.
But why is there no clash? They have met
by this!

MUSICIAN. Listen, I am called far seeing.
If Conchubar win,
You have a woman's wile that can do much
Even with men in pride of victory.
He is in love and old. What were one knife
Among a hundred?

DEIRDRE [*going towards them*]. Women, if I
die,
If Naisi die this night, how will you praise?
What words seek out? for that will stand to
you;
For being but dead we shall have many
friends.

All through your wanderings, the doors of
kings

Shall be thrown wider open, the poor man's
hearth

Heaped with new turf, because you are wear-
ing this [Gives bracelet.]

To show that you have Deirdre's story right.

MUSICIAN. Have you not been paid ser-
vants in love's house

To sweep the ashes out and keep the doors?
And though you have suffered all for mere
love's sake

You'd live your lives again.

DEIRDRE. Even this last hour.

[CONCHUBAR enters with dark-faced men.]

CONCHUBAR. One woman and two men,
that is a quarrel

That knows no mending. Bring the man she
chose

Because of his beauty and the strength of
his youth. [NAISI *is dragged in in a net.*]

NAISI. I have been taken like a bird or a
fish.

CONCHUBAR. He cried beast, beast, and in
a blind beast rage

He ran at me and fell into the nets.

But we were careful for your sake and took him

With all the comeliness that woke desire

Unbroken in him, for being old and lenient

I would not hurt a hair upon his head.

DEIRDRE. What do you say? Have you
forgiven him?

NAISI. He is but mocking us. What's left
to say

Now that the seven years' hunt is at an end?

DEIRDRE. He never doubted you until I
made him,

And therefore all the blame for what he says
Should fall on me.

CONCHUBAR. But his young blood is hot,
And if we're of one mind, he shall go free,
And I ask nothing for it, or if something,
Nothing I could not take. There is no king
In the wide world that, being so greatly
wronged,

Could copy me and give all vengeance up.

Although her marriage day had all but come,
You carried her away; but I'll show mercy.

Because you had the insolent strength of
youth,

You carried her away; but I've had time

To think it out through all these seven years;
I will show mercy.

NAISI. You have many words.

CONCHUBAR. I will not make a bargain, I
but ask

What is already mine. You may go free
If Deirdre will but walk into my house
Before the people's eyes, that they may know
When I have put the crown upon her head
I have not taken her by force and guile.
The doors are open, and the floors are
strewed,
And in the bridal chamber curtains sewn
With all enchantments that give happiness,
By races that being neighbors of the sun,
And of his kindred have no blood in their
veins, —

For when they're wounded, the wound drips
with wine, —

Nor speech but singing. At the bridal door
Two fair king's daughters carry in their
hands

The crown and robe.

DEIRDRE. Oh, no. Not that, not that.
Ask any other thing than that one thing.
Leave me with Naisi. We will go away.
Into some country at the ends of the earth.
We'll trouble you no more. You will be
praised

By everybody if you pardon us.

"He is good, he is good," they'll say to one
another,

"There's nobody like him, for he forgave
Deirdre and Naisi."

CONCHUBAR.

Do you think that I

Shall let you go again, after seven years

Of longing and of planning here and there,

And trafficking with merchants for the stones

That make all sure, and watching my own face

That none might read it?

DEIRDRE [*to NAISI*]. It's better to go with
him.

Why should you die when one can bear it all?

My life is over; it's better to obey.

Why should you die? I will not live long,

Naisi.

I'd not have you believe I'd long stay living.

Oh, no, no, no. You will go far away.

You will forget me. Speak, speak, Naisi,
speak,

And say that it is better that I go.

I will not ask it. Do not speak a word,
For I will take it all upon myself.

Conchubar, I will go.

NAISI.

And do you think

That were I given life at such a price
I would not cast it from me? O my eagle
Why do you beat vain wings upon the rock
When hollow night's above?

DEIRDRE.

It's better, Naisi.

It may be hard for you, but you'll forget.
For what am I to be remembered always,
And there are other women. There was one,
The daughter of the king of Leodas,
I could not sleep because of her. Speak to
him,
Tell it out plain and make him understand,
And if it be he thinks I shall stay living,

Say that I will not.

NAISI. Would I had lost life
Among those Scottish kings that sought it
of me,

Because you were my wife, or that the worst
Had taken you before this bargaining.

[He rises to his knees, struggling to free himself from the net, but sinks back.]

O eagle, if you were to do this thing,
And buy my life of Conchubar with your
body,

Love's law being broken, I would stand alone
Upon the eternal summits, and call out
And you could never come there, being ban-
ished.

DEIRDRE *[kneeling to CONCHUBAR]*. I would
obey but cannot. Pardon us.

I know that you are good. I have heard you
praised

For giving gifts. And you will pardon us,
Although I cannot go into your house.
It was my fault. I only should be punished.
The very moment these eyes fell on him,
I told him, I held out my hands to him.
And how could he refuse? At first he would
not. —

I am not lying. — He remembered you.
What do I say? My hands, no, no, my lips,
For I had pressed my lips upon his lips,
I swear it is not false. My breast to his

[CONCHUBAR *makes a sign, and* NAISE, *un-*
seen by DEIRDRE, *is taken behind the cur-*
tain.]

Until I woke the passion that's in all,

And how could he resist? I had my beauty.
You may have need of him, a brave, strong
man,

Who is not foolish at the council board,
Nor does he quarrel by the candlelight,
And give hard blows to dogs. A cup of wine
Moves him to mirth, not madness.

[She stands up.]

What am I saying?

You may have need of him for you have none
Who is so good a sword or so well loved
Among the common people. You may need
him.

And what king knows when the hour of need
may come?

You dream that you have men enough. You
laugh;

Yes, you are laughing to yourself. You say,
I am Conchubar; I have no need of him.
You will cry out for him some day and say,
If Naisi were but living — [*she misses NAISI*]

Where is he?

Where have you sent him, where is the son of
Usnach?

Where is he, oh, where is he?

[*She staggers over to the MUSICIANS.*]

[*The executioner has come out with a drawn
sword on which there is blood. CON-
CHUBAR points to it. The MUSICIANS
give a wail.*]

CONCHUBAR. The traitor who had carried
off my wife

No longer lives. Come to my house now,
Deirdre,

For he that called himself your husband's
dead.

DEIRDRE. Oh, do not touch me. Let me
go to him — [Pause.]

King Conchubar is right. My husband's
dead.

A single woman is of no account,
Lacking array of servants, linen cupboards.
The bacon hanging — and King Conchubar's
house

All ready too — I'll to King Conchubar's house.
It is but wisdom to do willingly
What has to be.

CONCHUBAR. But why are you so calm?
I thought that you would curse me and cry
out,
And fall upon the ground and tear your hair.

DEIRDRE [*laughing*]. You know too much
of women to think so,
Though if I were less worthy of desire,
I would pretend as much. But, being my-
self,
It is enough that you were master here.
Although we are so delicately made,
There's something brutal in us, and we are
won
By those who can shed blood. It was some
woman
That taught you how to woo; but do not
touch me,
For I'll go with you and do all your will
When I have done whatever's customary.
We lay the dead out, folding up the hands,
Closing the eyes and stretching out the feet,

And push a pillow underneath the head,
Till all's in order, and all this I'll do
For Naisi, son of Usnach.

CONCHUBAR. It is not fitting.

You are not now a wanderer but a queen,
And there are plenty that can do these things.

DEIRDRE. No, no. Not yet. I cannot be
your queen

Till the past's finished, and its debts are paid.
When a man dies and there are debts unpaid,
He wanders by the debtor's bed and cries,
There's so much owing.

CONCHUBAR. You are deceiving me.
You long to look upon his face again.
Why should I give you now to a dead man
That took you from a living?

[He makes a step towards her.]

DEIRDRE. In good time
You'll stir me to more passion than he
could,
And yet, if you are wise, you'll grant me
this,
That I go look upon him that was once
So strong and comely and held his head so
high
That women envied me; for I will see him
All blood-bedabbled and his beauty gone.
It's better when beside me in your strength
That the mind's eye should call up the soiled
body
And not the shape I loved. Look at him,
women.
He heard me pleading to be given up
Although my lover was still living, and yet

He doubts my purpose. I will have you tell
him

How changeable all women are. How soon
Even the best of lovers is forgot
When his day's finished.

CONCHUBAR. No, but I will trust
The strength you have spoken of and not
your purpose.

DEIRDRE [*almost with a caress*]. I'll have
this gift

Because it is the first that I have asked.
He has refused. There is no sap in him,
Nothing but empty veins. I thought as
much.

He has refused me the first thing I ask,
Me, me, his wife. I understand him now,
I know the sort of life I'll have with him,

But he must drag me to his house by force.
If he refuse [*she laughs*], he shall be mocked
of all.

They'll say to one another, "Look at him,
That is so jealous that he lured a man
From oversea, and murdered him, and yet
He trembled at the thought of a dead face."

[*She has her hand upon curtain.*]

CONCHUBAR. How do I know that you have
not some knife

And go to die upon his body?

DEIRDRE. Have me searched
If you would make so little of your queen.
It may be that I have a knife hid here
Under my dress. Bid one of these dark
slaves
To search me for it.

CONCHUBAR. Go to your farewells,
queen.

DEIRDRE. Now strike the wire and sing to
it awhile,

Knowing that all is happy and that you know
Within what bride-bed I shall lie this
night,

And by what man, and lie close up to him,
For the bed's narrow ; and there outsleep the
cockcrow.

[She goes behind the curtain.]

FIRST MUSICIAN. They are gone, they are
gone. The proud may lie by the proud.

SECOND MUSICIAN. Though we were bidden
to sing, cry nothing loud.

FIRST MUSICIAN. They are gone, they are
gone.

SECOND MUSICIAN. Whispering were
enough.

FIRST MUSICIAN. Into the secret wilder-
ness of their love.

SECOND MUSICIAN. A high, gray cairn,
what more is to be said?

FIRST MUSICIAN. Eagles have gone into
their cloudy bed.

[*Shouting outside. FERGUS enters.*]

FERGUS. Where's Naisi, son of Usnach,
and his queen?

I and a thousand reaping hooks and scythes
Demand him of you.

CONCHUBAR. You have come too late.
I have accomplished all. Deirdre is mine,
She is my queen, and no man now can rob me.
I had to climb the topmost bough and pull

This apple among the winds. Open the curtain

That Fergus learn my triumph from her lips.

[The curtain is drawn back.]

No, no. I'll not believe it. She is not dead.
She cannot have escaped a second time.

FERGUS. King, she is dead; but lay no
hand upon her.

What's this but empty cage and tangled
wire

Now the bird's gone; but I'll not have you
touch it.

CONCHUBAR. You are all traitors, all against
me, all;

And she has deceived me for a second
time;

And every common man may keep his wife,

But not the king.

[*One can see through doors and windows men, who carry scythes and sickles, and many torches. The wood is lighted with the torches which shine into the house. The crowd shouts: "Death to Conchubar," "Where is Naisi?" etc. The dark-skinned men gather round CONCHUBAR and draw their swords; but he motions them away.*]

CONCHUBAR. I have no need of weapons.
Howl if you will but I, being king, did right
In choosing her most fitting to be queen
And letting no boy lover come between.

APPENDIX I

THE LEGENDARY AND MYTHOLOGICAL FOUNDATION OF THE PLAYS AND POEMS

ALMOST every story I have used or person I have spoken of is in one or other of Lady Gregory's "Gods and Fighting Men" and "Cuchulain of Muirthemne." If my present small Dublin audience for poetical drama grows and spreads beyond Dublin, I shall owe it to these two books, masterpieces of prose, which can but make the old stories as familiar to Irishmen everywhere as are the stories of Arthur and his knights to all readers of books. I cannot believe that it is from friendship that I weigh these books with Mallory and feel no discontent at the tally, or that it is the wish to make the circumstantial origin of my own art familiar, that would make me give them before all other books to Irish boys and girls. I wrote for the most part before they were written, but all or all but all is there, Oisín wandering, Cuchulain killing his son and fighting the sea, Maeve and her children, Baile and Aillín, Angus and his fellow-immortals, all literally translated, though with much condensation and selection, from the old writings. A few

of my stories are not hers also. I took the story of "The Ballad of the Old Fox Hunter" from "Knocknagow," and the story of "The Ballad of Father Hart" from a Sligo county history; that of "The Ballad of Moll Magee" from a sermon preached in the chapel at Howth if I remember rightly, that of "The Countess Cathleen" from a story told as Irish by Leo Lespès in "*Les Matinées de Timothé Trimm*,"—there is a Donegal story resembling it in its principal incident in Larmonie's "*West Irish Folk Tales*,"—and the story of the "King's Threshold" from a middle Irish account of the fantastic demands of the poet at the court of King Guaire; but I have revised the moral of this last story to let the poet have the best of it. One of my fellow-playwrights is going, I have good hope, to take the other side and make a play that can be played after it, as in Greece the farce followed the tragedy. "The Shadowy Waters" and "The Land of Heart's Desire" have a good deal of incidental Irish folklore and mythology but are not founded on any particular story. Here and there, specially in "The Wind among the Reeds," I have used fragments of ancient mythology common to all lands. "The Deer with no Horns" and the "Flying Fawn" are certainly Irish symbols of the desire of the man which is for the woman, and the desire of the woman which is for the desire of the man, as Coleridge said; but it is only the speculation of Celtic scholars that makes the "Death-pale Deer" and "The Boar with-

out Bristles" not mere creatures of romance, but symbols of the end of all things. For a long time symbols of this kind had for me a very intense, a very personal importance, and they are too much woven into the fabric of my work for me to give a detailed account of them one by one.

APPENDIX II

THE DATES AND PLACES OF PERFORMANCE OF THE PLAYS

"THE Countess Cathleen" was first acted in Dublin on May 8, 1899, at the Ancient Concert Rooms, with Mr. Marcus St. John and Mr. Trevor Lowe as the First and Second Demons, Mr. Valentine Grace as Shemus Rua, Master Charles Sefton as Teig, Madame San Carolo as Maire, Miss Florence Farr as Aleel, Miss Anna Mather as Oona, Mr. Charles Holmes as the Herdsman, Mr. Jack Wilcox as the Gardener, Mr. Walford as a Peasant, Miss Dorothy Paget as a Spirit, Miss M. Kelly as a Peasant Woman, Mr. T. E. Wilkenson as a Servant, and Miss May Whitty as the Countess Cathleen.

They had to face a very vehement opposition stirred up by a politician and a newspaper; the one accusing me in a pamphlet, the other in long articles, day after day, of blasphemy, because of the language of the Demons in the first act, and because I made a woman sell her soul and yet escape damnation, and of a lack of patriotism because I made Irish men and women, who it seems never did such a thing, sell theirs. I could but answer that I knew many that sold their souls daily and for a lesser

price, but the controversy grew very fierce, and the politician and the newspaper made such obvious appeals to the audience to break the peace that something over a score of police were sent into the theatre to keep order. However, the stalls containing almost all that was distinguished in Dublin, and a gallery of artisans, alike insisted upon the freedom of literature. The greatest difficulty before the creator of a living Irish drama has been, and to some extent still is, the extreme sensitiveness of a nation, which has come to look upon Irish literature not as a free play of the mind over the surface and in the depths of life, but as a defence delivered before a prejudiced jury, who have heard a very confident advocate on the other side.

"The Countess Cathleen" was revived in New York about a year ago (I have not the exact date by me) by Miss Wycherley, and will probably be played next autumn, a good deal altered for technical reasons, at the Abbey Theatre.

"The Land of Heart's Desire" was first played at the Avenue Theatre, London, in the spring of 1894, with Mr. James Welch as Maurteen Bruin; Mr. A. E. W. Mason, Shawn Bruin; Father Hart, Mr. G. R. Foss; Bridget Bruin, Miss Charlotte Morland; Maire Bruin, Miss Winifred Fraser; A Faery Child, Dorothy Paget. It ran for about six weeks, and Mrs. Le Moyne and Miss Wycherley have toured with it in the United States, Mrs. Le Moyne playing it with Browning's "In a Balcony"

and Miss Wycherley with my "Hour Glass" and "Cathleen ni Houlihan." The first version of "The Shadowy Waters" was first performed on January 14, 1904, in the Molesworth Hall, Dublin, with the following players in the principal parts: Forgael, F. Fay; Aibric, Seumas O'Sullivan; Dectora, Maire NicShiubhlaigh. Its production was an accident, for in the first instance I had given it to the company that they might have some practice in the speaking of my sort of blank verse until I had a better play finished. It played badly enough, but a little better than I had feared; and as I had been in America when it was first played, I got it played again privately and gave it to Miss Farr for a theosophical convention that I might discover how to set it aright as a play. I then completely rewrote it in the form that it has in the text of this book, but this version had once again to be condensed and altered for its production in Dublin on November 28, 1906. Mr. Sinclair then took the part of Aibric and Miss Darragh that of Dectora, while Mr. F. Fay was Forgael as before. The scenery was designed by Mr. Robert Gregory.

"On Baile's Strand" was first played, but in a version considerably different from the present, on December 27, 1904, at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, and with the following cast: Cuchulain, Frank Fay; Conchobar, George Roberts; Daire (an old king, not now in the play), G. Macdonald; the Blind Man, Seumas O'Sullivan; the Fool, William

Fay; the Young Man, P. MacShiubhlaigh. The old and young kings were played by the following: R. Nash, N. Power, U. Wright, E. Kegan, Emma Vernon, Dora Gunning, Sara Allgood. It was revived by the National Theatre Society, Ltd., in a somewhat altered version at Oxford, Cambridge, and London a few months later. I then entirely rewrote it up to the entrance of the Young Man, and changed it a good deal from that on to the end, and this new version was played at the Abbey Theatre in April, 1906.

It is now as right as I can make it with my present experience, but it must always be a little over-complicated when played by itself. It is one of a cycle of plays dealing with Cuchulain, with his friends and enemies. One of these plays will have Aoife as its central character, and the principal motive of another will be the power of the witches over Cuchulain's life. The present play is a kind of cross-road, where too many interests meet and jostle for the hearer to take them in at a first hearing unless he listen carefully, or know something of the story of the other plays of the cycle.

"The King's Threshold" was first played October 7, 1903, in the Molesworth Hall by the Irish National Theatre Society, and with the following cast: Seanchan, F. Fay; King Guaire, P. Kelly; the Lord High Chamberlain, Seumas O'Sullivan; Soldier, W. Conroy; Monk, S. Sheridan-Neill; Mayor, W. Fay; a Cripple, P. Colomb; a Court

Lady, Honour Lavelle; another Court Lady, Dora Melville; a Princess, Sara Allgood; another Princess, Dora Gunning; Fedelm, Maire NicShiubhlaigh; a Servant, P. MacShiubhlaigh; another Servant, P. Josephs; a Pupil, G. Roberts; another Pupil, Cartia MacChormac.

It has been revised a good many times since then, and although the play has not been changed in the radical structure, the parts of the Mayor, Servant, and Cripples are altogether new, and the rest is altered here and there. It was written when our Society was having a hard fight for the recognition of pure art in a community of which one half was buried in the practical affairs of life and the other half in politics and a propagandist patriotism.

"Deirdre" was first played at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, on November 27, 1906, with Miss Darragh as Deirdre; Mr. Frank Fay as Naisi; Mr. Sinclair as Fergus; Mr. Kerrigan as Conchobar; and Miss Sara Allgood, Miss M'Neill, and Miss O'Dempsey as the Musicians. The scenery was by Mr. Robert Gregory.

APPENDIX III

ACTING VERSION OF THE SHADOWY WATERS

THE scene is the same as in the text except that the sail is dull copper colour. The poop rises several feet above the stage, and from the overhanging stern hangs a lanthorn with a greenish light. The sea or sky is represented by a semicircular cloth of which nothing can be seen except a dark abyss, for the stage is lighted by arclights so placed upon a bridge over the proscenium as to throw a perpendicular light upon the stage. The light is dim, and there are deep shadows which waver as if with the passage of clouds over the moon. The persons are dressed in blue and green, and move but little. Some sailors are discovered crouching by the sail. Forgael is asleep and Aibric standing by the tiller on the raised poop.

First Sailor. It is long enough, and too long, FORGAEL has been bringing us through the waste places of the great sea.

Second Sailor. We did not meet with a ship to make a prey of these eight weeks, or any shore or island to plunder or to harry. It is a hard thing,

age to be coming on me, and I not to get the chance of doing a robbery that would enable me to live quiet and honest to the end of my lifetime.

First Sailor. We are out since the new moon. What is worse again, it is the way we are in a ship, the barrels empty and my throat shrivelled with drought, and nothing to quench it but water only.

Forgael. [*In his sleep.*] Yes; there, there; that hair that is the colour of burning.

First Sailor. Listen to him now, calling out in his sleep.

Forgael. [*In his sleep.*] That pale forehead, that hair the colour of burning.

First Sailor. Some crazy dream he is in, and believe me it is no crazier than the thought he has waking. He is not the first that has had the wits drawn out from him through shadows and fantasies.

Second Sailor. That is what ails him. I have been thinking it this good while.

First Sailor. Do you remember that galley we sank at the time of the full moon?

Second Sailor. I do. We were becalmed the same night, and he sat up there playing that old harp of his until the moon had set.

First Sailor. I was sleeping up there by the bulwark, and when I woke in the sound of the harp a change came over my eyes, and I could see very strange things. The dead were floating upon the sea yet, and it seemed as if the life that went out of every one of them had turned to the shape of

a man-headed bird — grey they were, and they rose up of a sudden and called out with voices like our own, and flew away singing to the west. Words like this they were singing: "Happiness beyond measure, happiness where the sun dies."

Second Sailor. I understand well what they are doing. My mother used to be talking of birds of the sort. They are sent by the lasting watchers to lead men away from this world and its women to some place of shining women that cast no shadow, having lived before the making of the earth. But I have no mind to go following him to that place.

First Sailor. Let us creep up to him and kill him in his sleep.

Second Sailor. I would have made an end of him long ago, but that I was in dread of his harp. It is said that when he plays upon it he has power over all the listeners, with or without the body, seen or unseen, and any man that listens grows to be as mad as himself.

First Sailor. What way can he play it, being in his sleep?

Second Sailor. But who would be our Captain then to make out a course from the Bear and the Pole-star, and to bring us back home?

First Sailor. I have that thought out. We must have AIBRIC with us. He knows the constellations as well as Forgael. He is a good hand with the sword. Join with us; be our Captain, Aibric. We are agreed to put an end to Forgael, before he wakes.

There is no man but will be glad of it when it is done. Join with us, and you will have the Captain's share and profit.

Aibric. Silence! for you have taken Forgael's pay.

First Sailor. Little pay we have had this twelve-month. We would never have turned against him if he had brought us, as he promised, into seas that would be thick with ships. That was the bargain. What is the use of knocking about and fighting as we do unless we get the chance to drink more wine and kiss more women than lasting peaceable men through their long lifetime? You will be as good a leader as ever he was himself, if you will but join us.

Aibric. And do you think that I will join myself To men like you, and murder him who has been My master from my earliest childhood up? No! nor to a world of men like you When Forgael's in the other scale. Come! come! I'll answer to more purpose when you have drawn That sword out of its scabbard.

First Sailor. You have awaked him. We had best go, for we have missed this chance.

Forgael. Have the birds passed us? I could hear your voice.

But there were others.

Aibric. I have seen nothing pass.

Forgael. You are certain of it. I never wake from sleep

But that I am afraid they may have passed.
For they're my only pilots. I have not seen
them

For many days, and yet there must be many
Dying at every moment in the world.

Aibric. They have all but driven you crazy, and
already

The sailors have been plotting for your death,
And all the birds have cried into your ears,
Has lured you on to death.

Forgael. No; but they promised —

Aibric. I know their promises. You have told
me all.

They are to bring you to unheard of passion,
To some strange love the world knows nothing of.
Some ever-living woman as you think.

One that can cast no shadow, being unearthly.

But that's all folly. Turn the ship about,
Sail home again, be some fair woman's friend;
Be satisfied to live like other men,

And drive impossible dreams away. The world
Has beautiful women to please every man.

Forgael. But he that gets their love after the
fashion

Loves in brief longing and deceiving hope
And bodily tenderness, and finds that even
The bed of love, that in the imagination
Had seemed to be the giver of all peace,
Is no more than a wine cup in the tasting,
And as soon finished.

Aibric. All that ever loved
Have loved that way — there is no other way.

Forgael. Yet never have two lovers kissed but they
Believed there was some other near at hand,
And almost wept because they could not find it.

Aibric. When they have twenty years; in middle
life
They take a kiss for what a kiss is worth,
And let the dream go by.

Forgael. It's not a dream,
But the reality that makes our passion
As a lamp shadow — no — no lamp, the sun.
What the world's million lips are thirsting for,
Must be substantial somewhere.

Aibric. I have heard the Druids
Mutter such things as they awake from trance.
It may be that the dead have lit upon it,
Or those that never lived, no mortal can.

Forgael. I only of all living men shall find it.

Aibric. Then seek it in the habitable world,
Or leap into that sea and end a journey
That has no other end.

Forgael. I cannot answer.
I can see nothing plain; all's mystery.
Yet, sometimes there's a torch inside my head
That makes all clear, but when the light is gone
I have but images, analogies,
The mystic bread, the sacramental wine,
The red rose where the two shafts of the cross,
Body and soul, waking and sleep, death, life,

Whatever meaning ancient allegorists
Have settled on, are mixed into one joy.
For what's the rose but that; miraculous cries,
Old stories about mystic marriages,
Impossible truths. But when the torch is lit
All that is impossible is certain,
I plunge in the abyss.

[SAILORS *come in.*]

First Sailor. Look there! There in the mist!
A ship of spices.

Second Sailor. We would not have noticed her
but for the sweet smell through the air. Amber-
gris and sandalwood, and all the herbs the witches
bring from the sunrise.

First Sailor. No; but opoponax and cinnamon.

Forgael. [*Taking the tiller from Aibric.*] The ever-
living have kept my bargain for me, and paid you on
the nail.

Aibric. Take up that rope to make her fast while
we are plundering her.

First Sailor. There is a king on her deck, and a
queen. Where there is one woman it is certain
there will be others.

Aibric. Speak lower or they'll hear.

First Sailor. They cannot hear; they are too
much taken up with one another. Look! he has
stooped down and kissed her on the lips.

Second Sailor. When she finds out we have as
good men aboard she may not be too sorry in the
end.

First Sailor. She will be as dangerous as a wild cat. These queens think more of the riches and the great name they get by marriage than of a ready hand and a strong body.

Second Sailor. There is nobody is natural but a robber. That is the reason the whole world goes tottering about upon its bandy legs.

Aibric. Run at them now, and overpower the crew while yet asleep.

[SAILORS and AIBRIC go out. *The clashing of swords and confused voices are heard from the other ship, which cannot be seen because of the sail.*]

Forgael. [Who has remained at the tiller.] There ! There !

They come ! Gull, gannet, or diver,
But with a man's head, or a fair woman's.
They hover over the masthead awhile
To wait their friends, but when their friends have
come
They'll fly upon that secret way of theirs,
One — and one — a couple — five together.
And now they all wheel suddenly and fly
To the other side, and higher in the air,
They've gone up thither, friend's run up by friend.
They've gone to their beloved in the air,
In the waste of the high air, that they may wander
Among the windy meadows of the dawn.
But why are they still waiting ? Why are they
Circling and circling over the masthead ?

Ah! now they all look down — they'll speak of me
What the ever-living put into their minds,
And of that shadowless unearthly woman
At the world's end. I hear the message now.
But it's all mystery. There's one that cries,
"From love and hate." Before the sentence ends
Another breaks upon it with a cry,
"From love and death and out of sleep and waking."
And with the cry another cry is mixed,
"What can we do being shadows?" All mystery,
And I am drunken with a dizzy light.
But why do they still hover overhead?
Why are you circling there? Why do you linger?
Why do you not run to your desire?
Now that you have happy winged bodies.
Being too busy in the air, and the high air,
They cannot hear my voice. But why that circling?

[*The SAILORS have returned. DECTORA is with them. She is dressed in pale green, with copper ornaments on her dress, and has a copper crown upon her head. Her hair is dull red.*]

Forgael. [Turning and seeing her.] Why are you
standing with your eyes upon me?
You are not the world's core. O no, no, no!
That cannot be the meaning of the birds.
You are not its core. My teeth are in the world,
But have not bitten yet.

Dectora. I am a queen,
And ask for satisfaction upon these

Who have slain my husband and laid hands upon me.

Forgael. I'd set my hopes on one that had no shadow, —

Where do you come from? who brought you to this place?

Why do you cast a shadow? Answer me that.

Dectora. Would that the storm that overthrew my ships,

And drowned the treasures of nine conquered nations,

And blew me hither to my lasting sorrow,

Had drowned me also. But, being yet alive,

I ask a fitting punishment for all

That raised their hands against him.

Forgael.

There are some

That weigh and measure all in these waste seas —

They that have all the wisdom that's in life,

And all that prophesying images

Made of dim gold rave out in secret tombs;

They have it that the plans of kings and queens

Are dust on the moth's wing; that nothing matters

But laughter and tears — laughter, laughter, and tears

That every man should carry his own soul

Upon his shoulders.

Dectora. You've nothing but wild words,
And I would know if you would give me vengeance.

Forgael. When she finds out that I will not let her go —

When she knows that.

Dectora. What is it that you are mut-
tering —

That you'll not let me go? I am a queen.

Forgael. Although you are more beautiful than
any,

I almost long that it were possible;
But if I were to put you on that ship,
With sailors that were sworn to do your will,
And you had spread a sail for home, a wind
Would rise of a sudden, or a wave so huge,
It had washed among the stars and put them
out,

And beat the bulwark of your ship on mine,
Until you stood before me on the deck —
As now.

Dectora. Does wandering in these desolate
seas

And listening to the cry of wind and wave
Bring madness?

Forgael. Queen, I am not mad.

Dectora. And yet you say the water and the
wind

Would rise against me.

Forgael. No, I am not mad —

If it be not that hearing messages
From lasting watchers that outlive the moon,
At the most quiet midnight is to be stricken.

Dectora. And did those watchers bid you take
me captive?

Forgael. Both you and I are taken in the net.

It was their hands that plucked the winds awake
And blew you hither; and their mouths have promised

I shall have love in their immortal fashion.
They gave me that old harp of the nine spells
That is more mighty than the sun and moon,
Or than the shivering casting-net of the stars,
That none might take you from me.

Dectora. [*First trembling back from the mast where
the harp is, and then laughing.*]

For a moment

Your raving of a message and a harp
More mighty than the stars half troubled me.
But all that's raving. Who is there can compel
The daughter and grand-daughter of kings
To be his bedfellow?

Forgael. Until your lips

Have called me their beloved, I'll not kiss them.

Dectora. My husband and my king died at my
feet,

And yet you talk of love.

Forgael. The movement of time

Is shaken in these seas, and what one does
One moment has no might upon the moment
That follows after.

Dectora. I understand you now.

You have a Druid craft of wicked sound.
Wrung from the cold women of the sea —
A magic that can call a demon up.
Until my body give you kiss for kiss.

Forgael. Your soul shall give the kiss.

Dectora. I am not afraid,

While there's a rope to run into a noose
Or wave to drown. But I have done with words,
And I would have you look into my face
And know that is it fearless.

Forgael. Do what you will,
For neither I nor you can break a mesh
Of the great golden net that is about us.

Dectora. There's nothing in the world that's
worth a fear.

*[She passes FORGAEL and stands for a moment
looking into his face.]*

I have good reason for that thought.

*[She runs suddenly on to the raised part of the
poop.]*

And now
I can put fear away as a queen should.

*[She mounts on the bulwark and turns towards
FORGAEL.]*

Fool, fool! Although you have looked into my face
You did not see my purpose. I shall have gone
Before a hand can touch me.

Forgael. *[Folding his arms.]* My hands are still;
The ever-living hold us. Do what you will,
You cannot leap out of the golden net.

First Sailor. There is no need for you to drown.
Give us our pardon and we will bring you home on
your own ship, and make an end of this man that is
leading us to death.

Dectora. I promise it.

Aibric. I am on his side.

I'd strike a blow for him to give him time
To cast his dreams away.

First Sailor. He has put a sudden darkness over
the moon.

Dectora. Nine swords with handles of rhinoceros
horn
To him that strikes him first.

First Sailor. I will strike him first. No! for
that music of his might put a beast's head upon my
shoulders, or it may be two heads and they devour-
ing one another.

Dectora. I'll give a golden galley full of fruit
That has the heady flavour of new wine
To him that wounds him to the death.

Second Sailor. I'll strike at him. His spells will
die with him and vanish away.

Second Sailor. I'll strike at him.

The Others. And I! And I! And I!

First Sailor. [*Falling into a dream.*] It is what
they are saying,¹ there is some person dead in the
other ship; we have to go and wake him. They
did not say what way he came to his end, but it was
sudden.

Second Sailor. You are right, you are right. We
have to go to that wake.

Dectora. He has flung a Druid spell upon the air,
And set you dreaming.

Second Sailor. What way can we raise a keen, not knowing what name to call him by?

First Sailor. Come on to his ship. His name will come to mind in a moment. All I know is he died a thousand years ago, and was never yet waked.

Second Sailor. How can we wake him having no ale?

First Sailor. I saw a skin of ale aboard her — a pigskin of brown ale.

Third Sailor. Come to the ale, a pigskin of brown ale, a goatskin of yellow.

First Sailor. [*Singing.*] Brown ale and yellow; yellow and brown ale; a goatskin of yellow.

All. [*Singing.*] Brown ale and yellow; yellow and brown ale!

[SAILORS go out.]

Dectora. Protect me now, gods, that my people swear by.

[AIBRIC has risen from the ground where he had fallen. He has begun looking for his sword as if in a dream.]

Aibric. Where is my sword that fell out of my hand

When I first heard the news? Ah, there it is!

[He goes dreamily towards the sword, but DECTORA runs at it and takes it up before he can reach it.]

Aibric. [*Sleepily.*] Queen, give it me.

Dectora. No, I have need of it.

Aibric. Why do you need a sword? But you may keep it,

Now that he's dead I have no need of it,
For everything is gone.

A SAILOR. [*Calling from the other ship.*]

Come hither, Aibric,
And tell me who it is that we are waking.

Aibric. [*Half to DECTORA, half to himself.*]

What name had that dead king? Arthur of Britain?

No, no — not Arthur. I remember now.

It was golden-armed Iollan, and he died

Brokenhearted, having lost his queen

Through wicked spells. That is not all the tale,

For he was killed. O! O! O! O! O! O!

For golden-armed Iollan has been killed.

[*He goes out. While he has been speaking, and through part of what follows, one hears the singing of the SAILORS from the other ship. DECTORA stands with the sword lifted in front of FORGAEL.*]

Dectora. I will end all your magic on the instant.

[*Her voice becomes dreamy, and she lowers the sword slowly, and finally lets it fall. She spreads out her hair. She takes off her crown and lays it upon the deck.*]

The sword is to lie beside him in the grave.

It was in all his battles. I will spread my hair,

And wring my hands, and wail him bitterly,

For I have heard that he was proud and laughing,

Blue-eyed, and a quick runner on bare feet,

And that he died a thousand years ago.

O! O! O!

[FORGAEL *changes the tune.*]

But no, that is not it.

I knew him well, and while I heard him laughing
They killed him at my feet. O! O! O! O!

For golden-armed Iollan that I loved.

But what is it that made me say I loved him?

It was that harper put it in my thoughts,

But it is true. Why did they run upon him,

And beat the golden helmet with their swords?

Forgael. Do you not know me, lady? I am he
That you are weeping for.

Dectora.

No, for he is dead.

O! O! O! for golden-armed Iollan.

Forgael. It was so given out, but I will prove
That the grave-diggers in a dreamy frenzy
Have buried nothing but my golden arms.
Listen to that low-laughing string of the moon
And you will recollect my face and voice,
For you have listened to me playing it
These thousand years.

[*He starts up, listening to the birds. The harp
slips from his hands, and remains leaning
against the bulwarks behind him. The light
goes out of it.*]

What are the birds at there?

Why are they all a-flutter of a sudden?

What are you calling out above the mast?

If railing and reproach and mockery

Because I have awakened her to love

My magic strings, I'll make this answer to it:

Being driven on by voices and by dreams
That were clear messages from the ever-living,
I have done right. What could I but obey?
And yet you make a clamour of reproach.

Dectora. [*Laughing.*] Why, it's a wonder out of
reckoning

That I should keen him from the full of the moon
To the horn, and he be hale and hearty.

Forgael. How have I wronged her now that she
is merry?

But no, no, no! your cry is not against me.
You know the councils of the ever-living,
And all the tossing of your wings is joy,
And all that murmuring's but a marriage song;
But if it be reproach, I answer this:
There is not one among you that made love
By any other means. You call it passion,
Consideration, generosity;
But it was all deceit, and flattery
To win a woman in her own despite,
For love is war, and there is hatred in it;
And if you say that she came willingly —

Dectora. Why do you turn away and hide your face,
That I would look upon for ever?

Forgael. My grief.

Dectora. Have I not loved you for a thousand
years?

Forgael. I never have been golden-armed Iollan

Dectora. I do not understand. I know your face
Better than my own hands.

Forgael. I have deceived you
Out of all reckoning.

Dectora. Is it not true
That you were born a thousand years ago,
In islands where the children of Ængus wind
In happy dances under a windy moon,
And that you'll bring me there?

Forgael. I have deceived you;
I have deceived you utterly.

Dectora. How can that be?
Is it that though your eyes are full of love
Some other woman has a claim on you,
And I've but half?

Forgael. Oh, no!

Dectora. And if there is,
If there be half a hundred more, what matter?
I'll never give another thought to it;
No, no, nor half a thought; but do not speak.
Women are hard and proud and stubborn-hearted,
Their heads being turned with praise and flattery;
And that is why their lovers are afraid
To tell them a plain story.

Forgael. That's not the story;
But I have done so great a wrong against you,
There is no measure that it would not burst.
I will confess it all.

Dectora. What do I care,
Now that my body has begun to dream,
And you have grown to be a burning coal
In the imagination and intellect?

If something that's most fabulous were true —
If you had taken me by magic spells,
And killed a lover or husband at my feet —
I would not let you speak, for I would know
That it was yesterday and not to-day
I loved him; I would cover up my ears,
As I am doing now. [*A pause.*] Why do you weep?

Forgael. I weep because I've nothing for your eyes
But desolate waters and a battered ship.

Dectora. O, why do you not lift your eyes to mine?

Forgael. I weep — I weep because bare night's
above,

And not a roof of ivory and gold.

Dectora. I would grow jealous of the ivory roof,
And strike the golden pillars with my hands.

I would that there was nothing in the world
But my beloved — that night and day had perished,
And all that is and all that is to be,
All that is not the meeting of our lips.

Forgael. Why do you turn your eyes upon bare
night?

Am I to fear the waves, or is the moon
My enemy?

Dectora. I looked upon the moon,
Longing to knead and pull it into shape
That I might lay it on your head as a crown.
But now it is your thoughts that wander away,
For you are looking at the sea. Do you not know
How great a wrong it is to let one's thought
Wander a moment when one is in love?

[*He has moved away. She follows him. He is looking out over the sea, shading his eyes.*]

Dectora. Why are you looking at the sea?

Forgael. Look there!

There where the cloud creeps up upon the moon.

Dectora. What is there but a troop of ash-grey birds

That fly into the west?

[*The scene darkens, but there is a ray of light upon the figures.*]

Forgael. But listen, listen!

Dectora. What is there but the crying of the birds?

Forgael. If you'll but listen closely to that crying
You'll hear them calling out to one another
With human voices.

Dectora. Clouds have hid the moon.

The birds cry out, what can I do but tremble?

Forgael. They have been circling over our heads
in the air,

But now that they have taken to the road

We have to follow, for they are our pilots;

They're crying out. Can you not hear their cry —

“There is a country at the end of the world

Where no child's born but to outlive the moon.”

[*The SAILORS come in with AIBRIC. They carry torches.*]

Aibric. We have lit upon a treasure that's so
great

Imagination cannot reckon it.

The hold is full — boxes of precious spice,

Ivory images with amethyst eyes,
Dragons with eyes of ruby. The whole ship
Flashes as if it were a net of herrings.
Let us return to our own country, Forgael,
And spend it there. Have you not found this
queen?

What more have you to look for on the seas?

Forgael. I cannot — I am going on to the end.
As for this woman, I think she is coming with
me.

Aibric. Speak to him, lady, and bid him turn
the ship.

He knows that he is taking you to death;
He cannot contradict me.

Dectora. Is that true?

Forgael. I do not know for certain.

Dectora. Carry me

To some sure country, some familiar place.
Have we not everything that life can give
In having one another?

Forgael. How could I rest
If I refused the messengers and pilots
With all those sights and all that crying out?

Dectora. I am a woman, I die at every breath.

Aibric. [To the SAILORS.] To the other ship, for
there's no help in words,
And I will follow you and cut the rope
When I have said farewell to this man here,
For neither I nor any living man
Will look upon his face again.

[SAILORS go out, leaving one torch perhaps in a torchholder on the bulwark.]

Forgael. [To DECTORA.] Go with him,
For he will shelter you and bring you home.

Aibric. [Taking FORGAEL's hand.] I'll do it for
his sake.

Dectora. No. Take this sword
And cut the rope, for I go on with Forgael.

Aibric. Farewell! Farewell! [He goes out.]

Dectora. The sword is in the rope —
The rope's in two — it falls into the sea,
It whirls into the foam. O ancient worm,
Dragon that loved the world and held us to it,
You are broken, you are broken. The world drifts
away,

And I am left alone with my beloved,
Who cannot put me from his sight for ever.
We are alone for ever, and I laugh,
Forgael, because you cannot put me from you.
The mist has covered the heavens, and you and I
Shall be alone for ever. We two — this crown —
I half remember. It has been in my dreams.
Bend lower, O king, that I may crown you with it.
O flower of the branch, O bird among the leaves,
O silver fish that my two hands have taken
Out of the running stream, O morning star,
Trembling in the blue heavens like a white fawn
Upon the misty border of the wood,
Bend lower, that I may cover you with my hair,
For we will gaze upon this world no longer.

[The harp begins to burn as with fire.]

Forgael. [Gathering DECTORA's hair about him.]

Beloved, having dragged the net about us,
And knitted mesh to mesh, we grow immortal;
And that old harp awakens of itself
To cry aloud to the grey birds, and dreams,
That have had dreams for fathers, live in us.

[Curtain.]

APPENDIX IV

THE WORK OF THE NATIONAL THEATRE SOCIETY AT THE ABBEY THEATRE, DUBLIN: A STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES

I

THE most obvious difference between our modern literature which belongs to a cultivated class, and ancient literature which belonged to a whole people, is that the three great forms of ancient literature, narrative, lyrical, and dramatic, found their way to men's minds without the mediation of print and paper. When I first began working in Ireland at what some newspaper has called the Celtic Renaissance, I saw that we had still even in English a sufficient audience for song and speech. Certain of our young men and women, too restless and sociable to be readers, had amongst them an interest in Irish legend and history, and years of imaginative politics had kept them from forgetting, as most modern people have, how to listen to serious words. I always saw that some kind of theatre would be a natural centre for a tradition of feeling and thought, but that it must — and this was its chief opportunity — appeal to the interest appealed to by lively conversation or by oratory. These young people are

not, perhaps, very numerous, for they do not include the thousands of conquered spirits who in Dublin, as elsewhere, go to see the "Girl from Kay's," or when Mr. Tree is upon tour the "Girl from Prospero's Island"; and the peasant in Ireland, as elsewhere, has not taken to the theatre, and can, I think, be moved through Gaelic only.

If one could get them, I thought, one could draw to oneself the apathetic people who are in every country, and people who don't know what they like till somebody tells them. Now a friend has given me that theatre. It is not very big, but it is quite big enough to seat those few thousands and their friends in a seven days' run of a new play; and I have begun my real business. I have to find once again singers, minstrels, and players who love words more than any other thing under heaven, for without fine words there is no literature. I have to create a theatre of speech, of romance, of extravagance. In every art, when it seems to one that it has need of a renewing of life, one goes backwards till one lights upon a time when it was nearer to human life and instinct, before it had gathered about it so many mechanical specialisations and traditions. One examines that earlier condition and thinks out its principles of life, that one may be able to separate accidental from vital things. William Morris, for instance, studied the earliest printing, the fonts of type that were made when men saw their craft with eyes that were still new, and at leisure, and

without the restraints of commerce and custom. And then he made a type that was really new, that had the quality of his own mind about it, though it reminds one of its ancestry, of its high breeding as it were. Coleridge and Wordsworth were influenced by the publication of Percy's "Reliques" to the making of a simplicity altogether unlike that of old ballad writers. Rossetti went to early Italian painting, to Holy Families and choirs of angels, that he might learn how to express an emotion that had its roots in sexual desire and in the delight of his generation in fine clothes and in beautiful rooms. Nor is it otherwise with the reformers of churches and of the social order, for reform must justify itself by a return in feeling to something that our fathers have told us in the old time.

So it is with us; inspired by players who played before a figured curtain, we have made scenery, indeed, but scenery that is little more than a suggestion — a pattern with recurring boughs and leaves of gold for a wood, a great green curtain with a red stencil upon it to carry the eye upward for a palace, and so on. More important than these, we have looked for the centre of our art where the players of the time of Shakespeare and of Corneille found theirs, in speech, whether it be the perfect mimicry of the conversation of two countrymen of the roads, or that idealised speech poets have imagined for what we think but do not say. Before men read, the ear and the tongue were subtle, and delighted

one another with the little tunes that were in words; every word would have its own tune, though but one main note may have been marked enough for us to name it. They loved language, and all literature was then, whether in the mouth of minstrels, players, or singers, but the perfection of an art that everybody practised, a flower out of the stem of life. And language continually renewed itself in that perfection, returning to daily life out of that finer leisure, strengthened and sweetened as from a retreat ordered by religion. The ordinary dramatic critic, when you tell him that a play, if it is to be of a great kind, must have beautiful words, will answer that you have misunderstood the nature of the stage and are asking of it what books should give. Sometimes when some excellent man, a playgoer, certainly, and sometimes a critic, has read me a passage out of some poet, I have been set wondering what books of poetry can mean to the greater number of men. If they are to read poetry at all, if they are to enjoy beautiful rhythm, if they are to get from poetry anything but what it has in common with prose, they must hear it spoken by men who have music in their voices and a learned understanding of its sound. There is no poem so great that a fine speaker cannot make it greater, or that a bad ear cannot make it nothing. All the arts when young and happy are but the point of the spear whose handle is our daily life. When they grow old and unhappy, they perfect themselves away

from life, and life, seeing that they are sufficient to themselves, forgets them. The fruit of the tree that was in Eden grows out of a flower full of scent, rounds and ripens, until at last the little stem, that brought to it the sap out of the tree, dries up and breaks, and the fruit rots upon the ground.

The theatre grows more elaborate, developing the player at the expense of the poet, developing the scenery at the expense of the player, always increasing in importance whatever has come to it out of the mere mechanism of a building or the interests of a class, specialising more and more, doing whatever is easiest rather than what is most noble, and creating a class before the footlights as behind, who are stirred to excitements that belong to it and not to life; until at last life, which knows that a specialised energy is not herself, turns to other things, content to leave it to weaklings and triflers, to those in whose body there is the least quantity of herself.

II

But if we are to delight our three or four thousand young men and women with a delight that will follow them into their own houses, and if we are to add the countryman to their number, we shall need more than the play, we shall need those other spoken arts. The player rose into importance in the town, but the minstrel is of the country. We must have narrative as well as dramatic poetry, and presently we shall make room for it in the

theatre in the first instance; but in this also we must go to an earlier time. Modern recitation is not, like modern theatrical art, an overelaboration of a true art, but an entire misunderstanding. It has no tradition at all. It is an endeavour to do what can only be done well by the player. It has no relation of its own to life. Some young man in evening clothes will recite to you the "Dream of Eugene Aram," and it will be laughable, grotesque, and a little vulgar. Tragic emotions that need scenic illusion, a long preparation, a gradual heightening of emotion, are thrust into the middle of our common affairs. That they may be as extravagant, as little tempered by anything ideal or distant as possible, he will break up the rhythm, regarding neither the length of the lines nor the natural music of the phrases, and distort the accent by every casual impulse. He will gesticulate wildly, adapting his movements to the drama as if Eugene Aram were in the room before us, and all the time we see a young man in evening dress who has become unaccountably insane. Nothing that he can do or say will make us forget that he is Mr. Robinson the bank clerk, and that the toes of his boots turn upward. We have nothing to learn here. We must go to the villages or we must go back hundreds of years to Wolfram of Eisenbach and the castles of Thuringia. In this, as in all other arts, one finds its law and its true purpose when one is near the source. The minstrel never dramatised

anybody but himself. It was impossible, from the nature of the words the poet had put into his mouth, or that he had made for himself, that he should speak as another person. He will go no nearer to drama than we do in daily speech, and he will not allow you for any long time to forget himself. Our own Raftery will stop the tale to cry, "This is what I, Raftery, wrote down in the book of the people"; or "I, myself, Raftery, went to bed without supper that night." Or, if it is Wolfram, and the tale is of Gawain or Parsival, he will tell the listening ladies that he sings of happy love out of his own unhappy love, or he will interrupt the story of a siege and its hardships to remember his own house, where there is not enough food for the mice. He knows how to keep himself interesting that his words may have weight; so many lines of narrative, and then a phrase about himself and his emotions. The reciter cannot be a player, for that is a different art; but he must be a messenger, and he should be as interesting, as exciting, as are all that carry great news. He comes from off, and he speaks of far-off things with his own peculiar animation, and instead of lessening the ideal and beautiful elements of speech, he may, if he has a mind to, increase them. He may speak to actual notes as a singer does if they are so simple that he never loses the speaking voice, and if the poem is long he must do so, or his own voice will become weary and formless. His art is nearer to pattern than that of the

player. It is always allusion, never illusion; for what he tells of, no matter how impassioned he may become, is always distant, and for this reason he may permit himself every kind of nobleness. In a short poem he may interrupt the narrative with a burden, which the audience will soon learn to sing, and this burden, because it is repeated and need not tell a story to a first hearing, can have a more elaborate musical notation, can go nearer to ordinary song. Gradually other devices will occur to him,—effects of loudness and softness, of increasing and decreasing speed, certain rhythmic movements of his body, a score of forgotten things, for the art of speech is lost, and when one begins at it every day is a discovery. The reciter must be made exciting and wonderful in himself, apart from what he has to tell, and that is more difficult than it was in the Middle Ages. We are not mysterious to one another; we can come from far off and yet be no better than our neighbours. We are no longer like those Egyptian birds that flew out of Arabia, their claws full of spices; nor can we, like an ancient or mediæval poet, throw into our verses the emotions and events of our lives, or even dramatise, as they could, the life of the minstrel into whose mouth we are to put our words. I can think of nothing better than to borrow from the tellers of old tales, who will often pretend to have been at the wedding of the princess, or afterwards “when they were throwing out children by the basketful,” and

to give the story-teller definite fictitious personality and find for him an appropriate costume. Many costumes and persons come into my imagination. I imagine an old countryman upon the stage of the theatre or in some little country court-house where a Gaelic society is meeting, and I can hear him say that he is Raftery or a brother, and that he has tramped through France and Spain and the whole world. He has seen everything, and he has all country love tales at his finger tips. I can imagine, too, — and now the story-teller is more serious and more naked of country circumstance, — a jester with black cockscorn and black clothes. He has been in the faery hills; perhaps he is the terrible *Amadān-na-Breena* himself; or he has been so long in the world that he can tell of ancient battles. It is not as good as what we have lost, but we cannot hope to see in our time, except by some rare accident, the minstrel who differs from his audience in nothing but the exaltation of his mood, and who is yet as exciting and as romantic in their eyes as were Raftery and Wolfram to their people.

It is perhaps nearly impossible to make recitation a living thing, for there is no existing taste one can appeal to; but it should not be hard here in Ireland to interest people in songs that are made for the words' sake and not for the music, or for that only in a secondary degree. They are interested in such songs already, only the songs have little subtilty of thought and of language. One

does not find in them that modern emotion which seems new because it has been brought so very lately out of the cellar. At their best they are the songs of children and of country people, eternally young for all their centuries, and yet not even in old days, as one thinks, the art of king's houses. We require a method of setting to music that will make it possible to sing or to speak to notes a poem like Rossetti's translation of "The Ballad of Dead Ladies" in such a fashion that no word shall have an intonation or accentuation it could not have in passionate speech. It must be set for the speaking voice, like the songs that sailors make up or remember, and a man at the far end of the room must be able to take it down on a first hearing. An English musical paper said the other day, in commenting on something I had written, "Owing to musical necessities, vowels must be lengthened in singing to an extent which in speech would be ludicrous if not absolutely impossible." I have but one art, that of speech, and my feeling for music dissociated from speech is very slight, and listening as I do to the words with the better part of my attention, there is no modern song sung in the modern way that is not to my taste "ludicrous" and "impossible." I hear with older ears than the musician, and the songs of country people and of sailors delight me. I wonder why the musician is not content to set to music some arrangement of meaningless liquid vowels, and thereby to make

his song like that of the birds; but I do not judge his art for any purpose but my own.¹ It is worthless for my purpose certainly, and it is one of the causes that are bringing about in modern countries a degradation of language. I have to find men with more music than I have, who will develop to a finer subtilty the singing of the cottage and the forecastle, and develop it more on the side of speech than that of music, until it has become intellectual and nervous enough to be the vehicle of a Shelley or a Keats. For some purposes it will be necessary to divine the lineaments of a still older art, and re-create the regulated declamations that died out when music fell into its earliest elaborations. Miss Farr has divined enough of this older art, of which no fragment has come down to us, for even the music of Aucassin and Nicolette, with its definite tune, its recurring pattern of sound, is something more than declamation, to make the chorus of Hippolitus and of the Trojan Women, at the Court Theatre or the Lyric, intelligible speech, even when several

¹ I have heard musicians excuse themselves by claiming that they put the words there for the sake of the singer; but if that be so, why should not the singer sing something she may wish to have by rote? Nobody will hear the words; and the local time-table, or, so much suet and so many raisins, and so much spice and so much sugar, and whether it is to be put in a quick or a slow oven, would run very nicely with a little management.

voices spoke together. She used very often definite melodies of a very simple kind, but always when the thought became intricate and the measure grave and slow, fell back upon declamation regulated by notes. Her experiments have included almost every kind of verse, and every possible elaboration of sound compatible with the supremacy of the words. I do not think Homer is ever so moving as when she recites him to a little tune played on a stringed instrument not very unlike a lyre. She began at my suggestion with songs in plays, for it was clearly an absurd thing that words necessary to one's understanding of the action, either because they explained some character, or because they carried some emotion to its highest intensity, should be less intelligible than the bustling and ruder words of the dialogue. We have tried our art, since we first tried it in a theatre, upon many kinds of audiences, and have found that ordinary men and women take pleasure in it and sometimes tell one that they never understood poetry before. It is, however, more difficult to move those, fortunately for our purpose but a few, whose ears are accustomed to the abstract emotion and elaboration of notes in modern music.

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